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Continuous Extremes: Architecture of Uncertainty in Poland, 1945–

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Introduction

In Warsaw in October 1920, the Polish Army defeated the Soviet Red Army and stopped Lenin and Trotsky's trek toward Berlin. The "miracle on the Vistula," as the Polish victory came to be called, ended the prospect of a wider European socialist revolution and confined the Soviets' global communist project to the boundaries of a nation-state.¹ But twenty-five years later in 1945, as Nazi German occupiers retreated from the city and left nearly 85% of it destroyed, Warsaw seemed to be where such a revolution—at least in some form—was again possible. The Warsaw Uprising in the autumn of 1944, when Polish Home Army (AK) partisans tried to overthrow the Germans in advance of the Soviet Red Army arrival, had failed; the Germans then killed thousands of civilians and used flamethrowers to destroy the rest of the city block by block. Much of the war-ravaged country was, by early 1945, already controlled by the Soviet-backed State National Council (KRN) and its executive Polish Committee for National Liberation (PKWN); through rigged elections and other modes of institutional capture, the communists eventually controlled the entire government.²

The intersection of total destruction with an ascendent regime heightened the political stakes of architecture: little stood in the way of making Warsaw, and therefore Poland at-large, completely anew. In October 1945, the KRN nationalized nearly all of the land in the city, dispensing with the concept of private property and establishing the state as the city's architect and planning authority.³ A national Three-Year Plan conceived in September 1946 and Six-Year Plan in July 1950 dedicated vast resources to rebuilding efforts. Partisan cleansing of the government, intensifying in 1947 and 1948, made communism a nation-building project too. In 1948, the Polish Workers' Party

(PPR) merged with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), forming the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). As Warsaw was physically rebuilt, the communists built and consolidated state power through a process of political purification.⁴ Warsaw became the nexus of three major political shifts, a physical continuum between extreme forces each bearing heavily on architecture: the destructive force of German National Socialism, the influence of Soviet communism, and the bureaucratic clout and political momentum of a new Polish state.

While aerial imagery of Warsaw's *tabula rasa* is striking, it captures neither the acts of destruction that led to such a scene nor a singular agenda for the construction and reconstruction that ensued from it. Enticing images taken from the cockpits of military aircraft always exist in a "fluid relational context"⁵ with the political interests that commission them in the first place, inviting us to venture into and beyond their frames rather than fetishize the ruins within them. An important note with which to begin is that Polish architecture after 1945 faced a contradiction. Although because of the reconstruction effort architecture wielded new political power, the preceding war had also revealed that it was utterly destroyable and temporary. Architects, always burdened with a heightened sense of their work's permanence, met the dilemma more strongly than other arts. How should architecture, as a form and a discipline, reconcile its claim on the future with a past that has exposed its weakness and ethereality? In this thesis the act of making architecture, whether through enabling laws like the KRN's October 1945 Bierut Decree or through state-commissioned building and artistic projects, becomes as important as the resulting objects and spaces themselves. In neither a "top-down" nor "bottom-up" approach—neither the state nor the architects and artists completely control

the outcomes or the agendas—the act of designing buildings and spatial environments becomes a vector through which official space—government bureaucracies, educational institutions, exhibitions—intersects with the private spaces of individuals and artistic groups.

The European avant-garde that emerged after the First World War saw their world as a social tabula rasa in which traditional boundaries—whether cultural, political, or artistic—were gone. Art no longer *represented* the world; it *transformed* it. But in the context of 1945 Warsaw the art object was no longer permanent; indeed, it was now possible, in cities like Warsaw, Dresden, Hiroshima, or Nagasaki, for entire cities to melt into air. What had been the social and political project of the avant-garde now assumed an undeniably physical dimension, affecting architecture especially. In this thesis, three architects and a theater director—surrounded by poster designers, painters, and other multimedia artists—reflect how spatial and artistic forms can assume new terms in the fallout of physical devastation and in the midst of a fluid political environment. Either tasked with or otherwise involved in the project of rebuilding Poland's capital, society, and culture, the characters of this thesis navigated social, political, and physical dimensions of a new world. They made decisions on multiple diegetic levels of this thesis's broader narrative. They survived the Second World War and were forever affected by it. Many emerged in the years after the war as public figures with complex loyalties to the state, at different moments rejecting, dissenting, or complying with power. Their behaviors often *were* their work. They improvised, performing roles on the surface while enacting agendas below or beside it. They regularly lived amid irregularity, in situations where sending a letter to a friend abroad already entailed risk, where one's

daily life and work—especially when that work carried the political charge of art—was under extreme scrutiny.

The cast of characters includes the architect Maciej Nowicki, who remained in Poland through the war and worked for the KRN-backed Office for the Reconstruction of the Capital (BOS) in 1945. Chapter One follows his journey from Warsaw in the summer and fall of 1945 to his architectural practice in the United States and India from 1946 to 1950. The next is architect Helena Syrkus, a Polish Jew who survived the German occupation and, like Nowicki, joined the BOS. But unlike Nowicki, Syrkus saw Stalinism as a political and professional opportunity. Then there is theater director Tadeusz Kantor, who survived the war in undestroyed Kraków, rejected Socialist Realism and lost his job, and built an alternative career outside mainstream practice, state support, or conventional artistic disciplines. The final character is architect Oskar Hansen, who like Kantor spent his career outside conventional practice. Each character leveraged uncertainty as a possibility, learning ways to create form from ephemeral events, to improvise in order to continue, to tactically navigate the power of the state.

The Second World War was not “a moment of absolute discontinuity,”⁶ and Polish Stalinism—even in its most intense period between 1948 and 1953—was not a period of absolute adherence. A shared sense of dilemma weaves together the characters of this thesis, as they constantly resituate themselves among ideologies, organizations, and the state. There is a dilemma as to how to characters’ shifting loyalties constitute “continuity” or “rupture,” particularly as the first often gets maintained by enacting some form of the second. In the 1970 book *Exit, Voice, Loyalty*, Albert Hirschmann explores behaviors when organizations like companies and states fail to meet the expectations or

standards of their clients and constituents.⁷ Hirschmann defines the notions of “exit” and “voice” in relation to loyalty. “Exit” amounts to voting with one’s feet. “Voice” reforms the organization or its product in order to address problems before exit is necessary. “Loyalty” is not its own option; it is instead a measure of the personal stakes of either exit or voice. There is perhaps no better-known example of “voice” in the Stalinist period than poet Adam Ważyk’s “A Poem for Adults” of 1955, a work that demarcated the end of Socialist Realism and Stalinism in general. PZPR member Ważyk voiced his frustration with the Bolesław Bierut-led Stalinist regime that had been in power since 1947. His poem was controversial from the start, being one of the first widely read dissident works against the regime as it brought attention to the contradiction between promises of equality and prosperity and realities of general suffering. Arranged in fifteen parts, it concluded on a pleading, yet forceful, note:

We appeal on this earth
for which we did not gamble for with dice
for which a million died in battles
we appeal for clear truth, for the wheat of freedom,
for fiery reason,
for fiery reason,
we appeal daily,
we appeal through the Party.⁸

For Ważyk, as with many of the characters in this thesis, the Communist project was never worth entirely abandoning, but its goals had to be reclaimed. Marking a liberal turn in Polish politics in the mid-1950s, Ważyk’s poem and the year 1955 mark a transition in the thesis as well, where the highly idealistic work of Nowicki and Syrkus gives way to the more openly critical and self-aware projects of Kantor and Hansen. Throughout the chapters, loyalty is questioned; it dialogues with characters’ architectural, spatial, or artistic work; it registers in questions of form and space, as artists leave proposals

unfinished, create temporary and events-based architectural objects, and push on the boundaries of their respective disciplines.

Following Katherine Lebow's exploration of the socialist ideal city Nowa Huta built in the early 1950s near Kraków, the thesis considers how "individuals creatively used the materials at hand to shape meaningful stories of their own experience."⁹ But resourcefulness does not imply that stories are hidden within the recesses of the German occupation or the Stalinist period, only to be revealed here. On the contrary, the characters of the following chapters were professionally, ideologically, and personally ambitious. Their lives were public and controversial, their decisions widely scrutinized and critiqued. Choices in the following chapters occur in lines of contingency, not as grand plans. Rarely does a specific event become the "reason" for all the ensuing events. Architecture, instead, creates and reveals agency within a milieu; narratives intersect in collective moments without owing their formation to them. With that said, the biographies presented herein interact with the prevailing history of postwar Poland, often mirroring, and other times colliding, with it. The paths of the characters demonstrate the opening period of Poland between 1945 and 1948, before communists completed their institutional capture of the country with the fall 1947 legislative elections. The intense Stalinist terror from 1948 to 1953 manifests in different ways in each chapter, with Helena Syrkus of Chapter Three becoming particularly emblematic of the extreme pressures to which politically engaged Poles—and in her case, a politically engaged Polish Jew—were subject. Tadeusz Kantor and Oskar Hansen of Chapters Four and Five gain their formative education and life experience during the war and in the immediate years after, only to largely withdraw from public life during the Stalinist period. Much of

their significant contributions to Polish art and artistic pedagogy emerge in the early post-Stalinist, post-Thaw years.

The window for architects that was opened by Warsaw's 1945 *tabula rasa* narrowed by June 1949 when a special Conference of Party Architects (KAP) meeting ratified Socialist Realism into official architectural policy. But the role of the artistic mandate varies in this thesis from obstacle to opportunity. In *The Total Art of Stalinism*, Boris Groys reinterprets Socialist Realism as more than the cultural doctrine enforced in the Soviet Union after 1932 or in Soviet-conquered countries after 1945.¹⁰ Whereas Clement Greenberg positioned Socialist Realism and other forms of "kitsch" in opposition to a progressive avant-garde whose aesthetic was abstract and functional,¹¹ Groys understood Stalinism itself to be a continuation of "the internal logic of the avant-garde method," creating a society "organized in monolithic artistic forms."¹² Stalinism enacted a "unitary artistic plan" in which the Communist Party was an "artist whose material was the entire world," "whose goal was to 'overcome the resistance' of this material and make it pliant, malleable, capable of assuming any desired form."¹³ In the context of this thesis, not only was the physical *tabula rasa* of Warsaw connected to the politics of the Stalinist regime; Polish Stalinism was itself a project of political *tabula rasa*, remaking Warsaw and Polish society into monolithic artistic forms. Architects and artists could choose to engage the state as an authority, dictating what art could and could not be, or as their ultimate artistic-political project, one in which that they themselves crafted a monolithic landscape and society.

"Two camps are today realizing their contradictory world pictures and ideologies," went the KAP meeting's resulting resolution. "On the one hand, the camp of

democracy, socialism, and peace—with the Soviet Union as its main bastion—and on the other the camp of imperialism, economic crisis, and warmongering. The contest between these ideologies is also being waged in architecture.”¹⁴ Because Poland had an historically ambiguous location between Europe and what was now the Soviet Union, its new architecture had to negotiate a tenuous relationship with the country’s own past. For Maciej Nowicki in Chapter Two, Poland’s political turn toward Stalinism coincided with his decision to not return, taking up citizenship in the United States. Others, like Helena Syrkus of Chapter Three, found attempts to maintain international ties and friendships in modernist circles incompatible with the geopolitics of Stalinism. For many communist architects, Socialist Realism was an opportunity to reveal the internal conflicts of capitalism and the triumph of socialism. As architect Bohdan Lachert explained in his remarks at the KAP meeting, Socialist Realism was pedagogical:

The content of architecture, as a functional interpretation of being, will be socialist, but its form will remain immature, searching for a unique national expression. Our job is to accelerate the process [...] To educate architects, both Party members and not, to train the young cadres of architecture in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism, to explain on specific examples, particularly Soviet ones, how Socialist Realism arises and develops.¹⁵

The agenda of Socialist Realist architects, for Lachert and many others, was to pursue and teach a new national form, one that fostered socialism. It was an ongoing intellectual and spatial project, one whose results remained formally and stylistically undefined.

The notion that Polish Stalinist architecture would be “socialist in content and national in form” left space for interpretation, and this ambiguity is perhaps no better evidenced by Warsaw’s Palace of Culture and Science constructed from 1952 to 1955. Adorned with visibly “Polish” architectural features like a crenellated parapet and statuary of Polish secular heroes, the Palace’s massive base and central tower echoed Boris Iofan’s proposed *Palace of the Soviets* for Moscow from 1933. Soviet architect Lev

Rudnev, the Palace's designer, traveled around Poland with his collaborators in late 1951 in search of a "Polish national style," visiting monuments in Warsaw, Kraków, Toruń, and other cities.¹⁶ With Soviet funding support and an entire army of Russian construction workers brought in to help build it, the socialist skyscraper recast Warsaw's skyline as "an extension of Moscow's."¹⁷ But even small, everyday buildings were not free from ideological imperatives. Today at the corner of Aleja Jerozolimskie and Nowy Świat remains an interesting relic of the Stalinist period—a building with a tripartite neoclassical façade that is inscribed with the slogan CAŁY NARÓD BUDUJE SWOJĄ STOLICĘ (The whole nation builds its capital city). Designed by architect Zygmunt Stępiński in 1950 as part of the reconstruction of the Nowy Świat district, the building emblazoned in stone an equally socialist and nationalist idiom.¹⁸

The degree zero of Warsaw's *tabula rasa* in 1945 is therefore a point of departure for this thesis, not an enduring framework within which architecture came into being. *Tabula rasa* was not only the idea of a totalizing landscape of destruction, or of one totalitarian regime wholly displaced by another. Although chapters are haunted by the fact that architecture was proven reducible to rubble, they are incomplete; they serve instead as fleeting images of political and artistic concepts, distilled through biographies, that unfold over time. Iteration becomes an organizing device, allowing architecture to become an event, to exist in pluralities, and to move elusively across spaces and artistic disciplines.

The opening scene of Andrzej Wajda's 1957 film *Kanal* is an aerial view of Warsaw in the fallout of the 1944 Uprising. From the height of an aircraft, the camera pans over a desolate landscape and recalls a feeling of regret for misguided loyalty. From

this anticlimactic beginning, the rest of the film is also downcast. Polish underground Home Army (AK) soldiers and militiamen repeatedly say phrases like “this is the end” or “we’re all about to be finished off,” seeming to know from the start that the Uprising is doomed. Since “it made perfect Stalinist sense to encourage an uprising, and then not to assist,” the Soviets never intervened on behalf of the Poles, nor tried to stop the Germans’ revenge.¹⁹ After over five years of the occupation, their foresight was correct; this was the final devastating blow.

From the benefit of hindsight, *Kanal* points to a conundrum of loyalty that pervades Polish national narrative. Why start a battle that you will lose? Why risk an entire generation who might have otherwise led the country in the future? Why sacrifice Warsaw? Defeated loyalty resonates in loyalty’s inverse: betrayal. As historian Timothy Garton Ash notes, Poles by the end of the twentieth century still viewed the Allies’ actions at Yalta in January 1945 as an ultimate betrayal, since the agreement essentially yielded Poland to Stalin.²⁰ Loyalty, whether to fleeting ideologies or doomed causes, morally frames the actions of this thesis’s characters.

Warsaw in the lead-up to its devastation was not a city or clearly defined architectural object; it was a battlefield and a network of unfolding events. In Miron Białoszewski’s *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*, the 63-day battle resurfaced not as a stable memory, but as a jumble of moments scattered throughout ethereal spaces and buildings.²¹ The Uprising, for Białoszewski, is too difficult to put into formal words; an oral, conversational style works best. Warsaw was not streets and squares, but tactical decisions, risky operations, and frantic movements. Buildings are makeshift hideouts and morgues; courtyards are temporary refuges and burial grounds; barricaded public streets

are urban potato fields to feed the starving population. The city is not an object or even a landscape, but an interplay of actions unfolding with time.

For many of Warsaw's resistance fighters, the goal was not simply to "win" back the city or reconquer space, but to define the terms on which loss would occur. In the Ghetto Uprising of spring 1943 that preceded the Uprising of 1944, the battle was about "intentions rather than their outcomes," "rescuing human dignity" rather than "preserving Jewish life."²² Ghetto fighters attacked the Germans' as they attempted to liquidate the ghetto and deport the population to the Majdanek and Treblinka extermination camps. Whereas the 1944 Uprising would seek to regain control of Warsaw before Soviet arrival, the 1943 Uprising's goal was not to save Warsaw or its residents, but to die fighting. As surviving resistance fighter Marek Edelman put it,

It is a horrendous thing, when one is going so quietly to one's death. It is infinitely more difficult than to go out shooting. After all, it is much easier to die firing—for us it was much easier to die than it was for someone who first boarded a train car, then rode the train, then dug a hole, then undressed naked...Do you understand now?²³

The fight was not for dominion over a site, but for agency over how life would end. In the future, this meant that objects, buildings, or sites could never truly symbolize what the Jewish fighters went through or what their goals really were. In a 1980s interview, Edelman criticized the Monument to the Heroes of the Ghetto that was opened in Muranów:

...an upright man with a rifle in one hand, a grenade upraised in the other one, he has a cartridge pouch sashed about his waist, a bag with maps at his side, and a belt across his chest. None of them had ever looked like this: they didn't have rifles, cartridge pouches, or maps; besides, they were dark and dirty. But in the monument they look the way they were ideally supposed to. On the monument, everything is bright and beautiful.²⁴

As described in Michał Glowinski's *The Black Seasons*, the Warsaw Ghetto was "a place without a shape, deprived of any ordering principle."²⁵ Architecture lost the

ability to structure the events taking place within it—stopped delineating private from public space. Reflecting on his grandfather’s suicidal jump from a building, Głowiński explains that “during the Holocaust there were no private suicides. Every death, and especially [suicides], in some way rendered themselves part of a public realm.”²⁶ Behind the banner of the *tabula rasa* lie stories like these, in which architecture is no longer defined by walls, floors, and ceilings. Events have displaced architecture from its conventional social roles, enabling it to assume new forms.

During the war years, extreme acts of *improvising* became important spatial practices. The term “underground,” describing hiddenness and clandestine activities, was part of even the Polish government-in-exile and Home Army’s armed resistance efforts after 1939. After the German and Soviet invasions, the Polish state—operating first in France and then in London—governed from afar. Considering itself the continuation of the Second Polish Republic that the German and Soviet forces had displaced,²⁷ the government-in-exile brought some stability by conspiring to preserve some systems of justice, social welfare, education.

But the term “underground” has come to have many meanings, during the war and in the decades after. Countless examples of covert activities—including architectural ones—continued or emerged under the guise of other things in order to camouflage themselves. It is important to remember that both Hitler and Stalin intended “to decapitate Polish society, to leave Poles as a malleable mass that could be ruled rather than governed.”²⁸ This meant wiping out the educated classes. In September 1939, just after the invasion, the Nazis assembled twenty-five prominent and educated residents of Bydgoszcz and slaughtered them publicly. *Sonderaktion Krakau* two months later saw

the arrest and deportation of 184 faculty and teaching staff from universities in Kraków, Poland's academic capital. The Germans banned the teaching of architecture but allowed instruction in "building trades." Warsaw Polytechnic, Poland's flagship institution of architectural education and training, officially closed. Many of its faculty were reassigned to the "School of Building Trades," where Maciej Nowicki, protagonist of Chapter Two, worked as a bricklaying instructor.²⁹ Beneath the surface, however, the Polytechnic's architecture program operated unofficially, with 23 graduate theses, nine doctorates, and eight post-doctorates conferred during the occupation—all camouflaged as "draftsman classes."³⁰

Improvisation was a collective project that invested in society, but its stakes were personal. Architects and non-architects created forms of permanence and longevity—objects that stabilized, civilized, and documented. In September 1939, Polish Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum, who was trapped in the Warsaw Ghetto with his family, began assembling a historical archive. Using the Jewish Social Self-Help Organization as cover for his efforts, he and a team gathered documents, diaries, and other ephemera to record the memory of the Jewish community should everyone perish. Bottles, milk cans, metal boxes, and other objects became containers as they distributed the archive throughout the ghetto in several hiding locations. It was a spatial practice of documenting events, transforming uncertainty into permanence, and creating a form dispersed across a landscape. Although Ringelblum was killed shortly after escaping the ghetto, his archive outlived him. Much of it was recovered after the war and continues today to serve the Jewish Historical Institute and perpetuate the memory of the ghetto.

At one point in Ringelblum's writings, he describes a woman named "Mrs. I"—

later identified as future Israeli diplomat and politician Batya Temkin-Berman—who created her own architecture within the confines and material limitations of the ghetto by collecting books to establish a children’s library. She defied fears that the ghetto was a death sentence, making a social and cultural investment in the future. Mrs. I eventually escaped the ghetto to the Polish side, changing her agenda to a rescue operation. As Ringelblum described her, composure under pressure was one of Mrs. I’s spatial tactics that never changed:

Mrs. I does not have an especially “good” appearance, but she knows that it is not one’s face but one’s behaviour that determines whether one can survive “on the surface.” She always keeps calm and cheerful, is not afraid of anyone and always smiles. She wears mourning in order to appear more dignified. If anyone glances at her in the tramway, she walks up to him and asks what time it is.³¹

As she worked to physically blend herself into the crowd, Temkin-Berman stood out; projecting an unremarkable image allowed her agendas to proceed beneath it.

Writing in 1951, émigré Polish poet Czesław Miłosz remembered a remarkably everyday scene from the early years of the war, one whose seeming indifference to the whirling chaos of the surrounding world stuck with him as he passed through a train station in Ukraine:

...I suddenly stopped and looked. A peasant family—husband and wife and two children—had settled down by the wall. They were sitting on baskets and bundles. The wife was feeding the younger child; the husband, who had a dark, wrinkled face and a black, drooping mustache was pouring tea out of a kettle into a cup for the older boy. They were whispering to each other in Polish. I gazed at them until I felt moved to the point of tears. What had stopped my steps so suddenly and touched me so profoundly was their *difference*. This was a human group, an island in a crowd that lacked something proper to humble, ordinary human life. The gesture of a hand pouring tea, the careful, delicate handing of the cup to the child, the worried words I guessed from the movement of their lips, their isolation, their privacy in the midst of the crowd—that is what moved me.³²

Amid the whirl of travelers in the building and the raging war outside, this peasant family annexed transient space in order to sit, eat, and have tea. Their civil behavior lacked, for

Miłosz, an appropriate response to the austerity of their predicament. Transforming their *place* on the muddy floor into a *space*, the family created stability amid uncertainty.³³

Improvisation was a reality of the Stalinist period as well, with the new communist regime capturing institutions and consolidating power through surveillance, censorship, and ideological mandates. In a speech in 1950, president Bolesław Bierut explained that Poland's socialist transformation was an onslaught of pervasive "truth" infiltrating all aspects of life:

...our forces are growing everyday. The lies and slanders spread by the enemy, the attempts to prey on ignorance and fanaticism will not be able to resist the offensive of truth which is carried out by our Party, a truth realized everyday in work and in deed, embodied in millions of cemented bricks, of millions of tons of extracted coal, of millions of printed books.³⁴

Miłosz, attempting to capture the consequences of this reality in words, described the practice of *ketman* as a way of negotiating between inner and outer life:

It is hard to define the type of relationship that prevails between people in the East otherwise than as acting, with the exception that one does not perform on a theater stage but in the street, office, factory, meeting hall, or even the room one lives in." [...] Before it leaves the lips, every word must be evaluated as to its consequences. A smile that appears at the wrong moment, a glance that is not all it should be can occasion dangerous suspicions and accusations. Even one's gestures, tone of voice, or preference for certain kinds of neckties are interpreted as signs of one's political tendencies.³⁵

Ketman was everyday performance, "a constant and universal masquerade" that privatized parts of a centrally planned social environment. Although for Miłosz it described the particularly tenuous condition of intellectuals compelled to produce their work in compliance with Socialist Realism and other Stalinist mandates, he understood it as a wider cultural phenomenon that allowed subsistence within Stalinism even in the presence of alternative opinions or beliefs:

To say something is white when one thinks it black, to smile inwardly when one is outwardly solemn, to hate when one manifests love, to know when one pretends not to know, and thus to play one's adversary for a fool (even as he is playing you for one)—these actions lead one to prize one's cunning above all else.³⁶

Ketman offered an active “inner sanctuary” distinct from a declared outer appearance: a private domain “more precious the greater the price [one] pays in order to bar others from access to it.” It allowed “self-realization *against* something,” serving as “a wall which [individuals] batter themselves against, but which provides them with a resistance that helps them define themselves.”³⁷ In this thesis, ketman means different things: sometimes one exited the scene, withdrew from public life, or left Poland altogether. At other moments, collusion was necessary or even convenient: after all, there were commissions to obtain from the Ministry of Culture, diplomatic excursions to organize, state-funded exhibitions to curate, speeches to give. As ketman delineated a “real” inner world from a “performed” outer one, it created a space within which to truly become oneself. A technique of this thesis is to identify inconsistencies between what is said and what is done, between the outer worlds of the characters and what they are actively *doing* within them.

Chapter Structure

Writing a singular history of the architecture and artistic culture of postwar Poland is impossible given the gravity of such destruction and events and the plurality of collective and individual responses that these events transpired. Although it would be tempting to bifurcate the story between the physical fallout of *tabula rasa* and the political hegemony of the Stalinist regime, the following chapters explore nuanced and incomplete stories where different—and often contradictory—loyalties and agendas emerge. Institutions, places, people, and ideologies evolve; agendas intersect and diverge. Taken together, the characters are best described as “survivors.” But the complexity and

plurality of their stories mean a certain difficulty of capturing all of them together. This thesis is therefore conceived as a type of group biography in which neither a particular set of responses nor pattern of adherence explain the behaviors of people, forms, and space, but in which a selection of intersecting stories of survival and improvisation exposes common questions and challenges. While characters confront the same historical moments, even—in some cases—crossing paths in time and space, they do not follow the same trajectory. Whereas the 1945 landscape of Warsaw and the consolidation of power by the communist regime suggest monolithic architectural problems and grand political narratives, the chapters of this thesis demonstrate that narrative is always muddled by contingency.

Chapter One brings on-stage the city of Warsaw itself—a physical landscape, a designed object, a bureaucracy, and a nucleus of political power. Warsaw assumes various identities after 1945 as it broadcasts itself to the world through posters, exhibitions, and other ephemeral images. Architecture increasingly blurs into other artistic disciplines as Warsaw's rebuilding effort gets taken up as a political and aesthetic subject—as architects collaborate with painters, poster designers, and other visual artists. But these mediated forms of Warsaw alternate between declared and active descriptors. On the surface, Warsaw is the destroyed and rebuilt capital of Poland and a metonym for the state and its bureaucracies. Below that surface, interactions ensue between the state, architects and artists, and evolving artistic disciplines involved in reconstruction. *Warsaw Lives Again*, an exhibition featured in the chapter, becomes a site of interaction between the characters of Chapters Two and Three and a historical frame around the especially mobile, adaptable forms that postwar Warsaw assumed. The chapter roadmaps those that

follow it, disrupting architecture's disciplinary definitions and demonstrating the political, aesthetic, and professional stakes of reconstruction.

In Chapter Two, architect-turned-diplomat Maciej Nowicki, one of *Warsaw Lives Again*'s many organizers, enacts his own process of taking Warsaw abroad by defecting from his native Poland and reinventing his architectural and teaching practice in the United States and India. Helena Syrkus of Chapter Three, another organizer of *Warsaw Lives Again*, forms an pedagogical, events-based practice of speech-making, letter-writing, and housing activism that reveal ways that her ideological aspirations, her experiences as a Polish Jew, and the personal dimensions of her experience with Stalinism inflect her architecture.

Syrkus's uniquely events-based and performative architectural practice in Chapter Three questions the border between performance and reality, leading to Chapter Four and the theater practices of Kraków-based artist Tadeusz Kantor. Here, in one of the few large Polish cities neither destroyed nor significantly damaged during the war, Kantor's postdramatic theater and visual arts practice blurring the "performed" with the "real" becomes a spatial practice with architectural consequences. Where traditional theater emphasized the primacy of the dramatic script, Kantor distorted, subverted, and forced the narrative to become nuanced by subjectivity, chance, and everyday life. Instead of projecting illusion from the stage, Kantor brought the outside world into the auditorium and theater into the streets.

While the first four chapters explore architecture confronting the uncertainty of extreme conditions, Chapter Five centers uncertainty as an explicit architectural strategy. In his theory of Open Form (1959), Oskar Hansen explained that form should be

predisposed to change, that architecture should not be “defined beforehand in its manifestation.” Architecture, like life itself, would unfold with time; its ultimate form would always be solved somewhere in the future. Punctuating the thesis chronologically and thematically, Chapter Five situates Open Form as a name for the performative, pedagogical, and form-making practices that had already emerged in Polish architecture in the previous chapters.

¹ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 7, 388. "Miracle on the Vistula" in Polish: Cud nad Wisłą.

² KRN: Krajowa Rada Narodowa. PKWN: Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego. The KRN was founded in December 1943 and opposed the Polish government-in-exile that had operated from abroad throughout the war.

³ "Decree of October 26, 1945 about the ownership and use of land in the vicinity of the capital city Warsaw," Ministry of Reconstruction for the State National Council, October 26, 1945. Journal of Laws in ISAP – *The Internet System of Legal Acts, Poland*

<<http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19450500279>> Wording in the Decree: "In order to enable the rational reconstruction of the capital and its continued growth in accordance with the needs of the Nation, in particular to quickly address the land and its appropriate use, any land in the Capital City of Warsaw will be from this day forward property of the Capital City of Warsaw."

⁴ Snyder, *Reconstruction*, 8. PPR: Polska Partia Robotnicza. PPS: Polska Partia Socjalistyczna. PZPR: Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza.

⁵ Paula Amad, "From God's-eye to Camera-eye: Aerial Photography's Post-humanist and Neo-humanist Visions of the World," *History of Photography*, Volume 36, Iss. 1 (2012), 67.

⁶ Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918-1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 5.

⁷ Albert O. Hirschmann, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1970.

⁸ Adam Ważyk, "Poemat dla dorosłych," 1955. <http://lewicowo.pl/poemat-dla-doroslych/> Accessed January 28, 2021.

⁹ Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949-56* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 7.

¹⁰ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

¹¹ Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 1939/1961. In Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 3-21.

¹² Groys, *Total Art*, 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴ Excerpt from a resolution adopted by the National Congress of Polish Architects, June 20-21, 1949. In Anders Åman, *Architecture and ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin era*. (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1992), xiv. Conference of Party Architects is Konferencja Architektów Partyjnych in Polish.

¹⁵ Bohdan Lachert, "For Polish Socialist Architecture," speech. Materials of the Conference of Party Architects, Warsaw. 20-21 June 1949, Translation in *Just After the War*, eds. Joanna Kordjak and Agnieszka Szewczyk (Warsaw: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, 2018), 161.

¹⁶ Michał Murawski, *The Palace Complex: A Stalinist Skyscraper, Capitalist Warsaw, and a City Transfixed* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 73

¹⁷ Nikolaos Drosos, "Modernism with a Human Face: Synthesis of Art and Architecture in Eastern Europe, 1954-1958" PhD dissertation, City University of New York, (2016), 78.

¹⁸ Åman, Anders. *Architecture and ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin era*. (New York: Architectural History Foundation and Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992): p. 15.

¹⁹ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 305.

²⁰ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 3.

²¹ Miron Białoszewski, *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*, 1970. trans. Madeline G. Levine. New York: New York Review of Books, 2013.

²² Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 291-292.

²³ Hanna Krall, *Shielding the Flame: An Intimate Conversation with Dr. Marek Edelman, the Last Surviving Leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. trans. Joanna Stasinska and Lawrence Weschler (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1986), 77. Edelman fought for the Jewish Combat Organization (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁵ Michał Głowiński, *The Black Seasons*, trans. Marci Shore (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

²⁷ Włodzimierz Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*. trans. Barbara Harshav (Madison: University of

Wisconsin Press, 2006), 11.

²⁸ Snyder, *Reconstruction*, 153.

²⁹ Tyler Sprague, "Expressive Structure: The Life and Work of Matthew Nowicki," PhD dissertation (University of Washington, 2013), 115.

³⁰ Stanisław Jankowski, "Warsaw: Destruction, Secret Town Planning, 1939-44, and Postwar Reconstruction," *Rebuilding Europe's Bombed Cities*, ed. Jeffry M. Diefendorf (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1990), 82.

³¹ Emanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*, eds. Joseph Kermish, Shmuel Krakowski (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1974), 109. "Good looks" (in Polish, *dobry wygląd* or *aryjski wygląd*) were the supposedly non-Jewish appearances of fortunate individuals, constituted by such features as blue eyes and blond hair. As Michał Głowiński put it, they "meant that the person in hiding aroused less suspicion, [...] could blend into the crowd, [...] [could] play the role of someone they were not." See Głowiński, *Black Seasons*, 91-92.

³² Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*, 1953. trans. Jane Zielonko (New York: Random House, 1990), 248-249. Original Polish: "Była to ludzka rodzina, jak wyspa w tłumie, któremu czegoś brakowało do zwyczajnego, małego człowieczeństwa."

³³ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117.

³⁴ Bolesław Bierut, "We Are Building the Structure of Socialist Poland," 16 July 1950 in *The Six-Year Plan of Economic Development and Building the Foundations of Socialism in Poland*. (Warszawa, 1950): 14.

³⁵ Miłosz, *Captive*, 54.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

Chapter 1

Warsaw On the Move: Posters, Exhibitions, and Architecture, 1945-1958

It was on May 3, 1945, five days before the official end of the Second World War, that the exhibition *Warsaw Accuses* opened at the badly damaged National Museum in Warsaw. Bolesław Bierut, chair of the State National Council who would eventually become Polish president, personally opened it. Open until January 18, 1946, the exhibition's "goal was not to become another singular demonstration of national suffering," but instead to serve as solemn, irrefutable evidence of crimes that had taken place. These crimes were against Warsaw and the entire Polish nation: "Warsaw does not lament, it does not complain, but before the tribunal of nations WARSAW ACCUSES."¹ Funded by the State National Council's Ministry of Culture, the exhibition organized around anti-German, antiwar, and socialist themes.²

By its close in 1946, the exhibition hosted roughly 43,000 visitors, including Polish citizens, foreign diplomats and politicians, and public figures.³ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe and future American President, reported after his visit to the city and the exhibition in 1945: "Warsaw is far more tragic than anything I have seen...This represents deliberate destruction and the burning out of an entire city by the Germans."⁴ On the first floor of the heavily damaged museum, director Stanisław Lorentz and brothers Stanisław and Wojciech Zamecznik presented an assortment of art fragments, archeological objects, books, archived documents, furniture and other items that represented what remained of Polish material culture after the war. The national exhibition, then its subsequent international version *Warsaw Lives Again* that traveled in the United States and England, projected

anthropomorphic images of the city accusing its former abusers and reemerging from its ashes. The exhibition opened simultaneously with the reopening of the city's water supply system and other infrastructures, foreshadowing how Warsaw's physical realities and mediated image would be closely integrated for years to come.⁵

Jan Maass's mural on the north wall of the "Hall of Destruction" confronted visitors as they began their trek, depicting the contrast between the Germans' long siege of Warsaw and the beauty of the historic city itself. Flying bomber planes and ominous military tanks clashed with historic churches, palaces, and other monuments, soon to destroy them. With light spilling over the mural from large windows on the eastern wall, a headless statue—like everything else in the room, presumably damaged during the war—stood like the decapitated city and addressed the rest of the room. On the western wall, phrases like "they demeaned," "they destroyed," and "this was what they left" labeled groups of damaged artifacts that sat on the floor below. These piles collected anonymous works that ostensibly lacked owners, authors, and names. The approach transmitted the general atmosphere of the city, where buildings and landmarks had been so thoroughly reduced to debris that they were unrecognizable.

In the 1896 absurdist play *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry, Poland was "nowhere." Because fin-de-siècle Poland was still partitioned between Prussia, Russia, and Austria-Hungary, Jarry's characterization was partly true. Hitler justified his 1939 invasion of Poland and the fraudulent Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with the notion that the Second Polish Republic was the "unreal creation" of the Treaty of Versailles—that Poland was an illegitimate state from its start, not a real place.⁶ But when *Warsaw Accuses* became *Warsaw Lives Again* in spring 1946 and traveled abroad, it projected to the world an

image that was just as real in the past as it was in the present.

In the years after 1945, diffused images of Warsaw like *Warsaw Accuses* and *Warsaw Lives Again* consolidated the shattered city in new political and spatial formations. One of these formations was the reconstruction of Poland itself, centering Warsaw as the heart and symbol of the entire nation. The city was politically metonymic, representing the reconstruction effort the Party's agenda to "build socialism." Another formation was an international and Soviet-backed politics of peace, presenting Warsaw as living evidence of the effects of fascistic imperialism. While this perpetuated the idea of Warsaw as a bad memory, it moved the city forward as an eternal warning, like Hiroshima or Nagasaki, against future military conflict. Warsaw was also a bureaucratic formation, being near the physical center of Poland and housing the administrative infrastructure for various governmental agencies. Interactions between architects and artists, state apparatuses like the Ministry of Culture, and institutions like the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts fostered professional networks for making, learning, and teaching art. Warsaw's imageability was therefore political, both domestically within Poland and internationally between the Soviet Union and the West. It was spatial, with buildings and entire districts of Warsaw built from and for images. It was multidisciplinary, with architects and artists from various fields collaborating on public projects, amateurs building careers in unconventional ways, and architects, graphic designers, sculptors, and painters working outside the traditional boundaries of their respective disciplines. There was not one Warsaw, but many.

In his book on the emergence of the modern museum, Tony Bennett describes an "exhibitionary complex" originating in the nineteenth century that consolidates state

power through citizens' self-regulation.⁷ Inverting Foucault's invisible "carceral archipelago" by returning to *ancien régime* tactics of public spectacle that both coerce and display in order to consolidate power, the exhibitionary complex creates narrative and order through the public's ability to see itself. Since the phenomenon, per Bennett's account, largely developed from the typology of national exhibitions, he gave the examples of the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in London and the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, events in which the state asserted power through a "reversal of the principles of the Panopticon" and an employment of "the panorama, forming a technology of vision which served not to atomize and disperse the crowd but to regulate it, and to do so by rendering it visible to itself, by making the crowd itself the ultimate spectacle."⁸ Attendees both viewed and displayed; by seeing they *knew*, by being a part of the spectacle they produced part of its form and content.

In the case of post-1945 Warsaw, the city's image often represented Polish society at-large, defining a geopolitical exhibitionary complex in which elusive images of reconstruction made up a larger image. Various dispositions of the city, and therefore Poland more broadly, became dispersed across exhibitions, posters, paintings, photobooks, and events. They mediated the city to its residents, to Poles generally, and to the outside world. Both the authors of these multimedia projects and the people who experienced their work built Warsaw by imagining and participating in it. The city was a material: ruins and reconstructed buildings repurposed as structural fill, distributed at home or abroad as signifiers on posters, physically occupied during parades and public demonstrations. It operated as a symbol: a metaphor of Poland's suffering, a reminder of the devastating effects of fascist imperialism, and the promise of the nation's future. It

became a collective identity in which Poles and non-Poles could participate: a non-human person that died in a terrible war and was now being brought to life again, in the form of a new, ideal person. It became an apparatus in which medias, artists, and political, professional, and academic institutions generated spaces and forms.

As the propaganda regime of Stalinist and post-Stalinist governments evolved from 1945 to the late 1950s, the city's exhibitionary complex fostered a confrontation between its physical, institutional, and art disciplinary realities. It enabled alternative careers like amateur Tadeusz Trepkowski's work in poster design; generated symbolic objects like the Palace of Culture and Science and the 10th Anniversary Stadium; reimagined artistic institutions like the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts; shaped the physical space of the city itself. Behind the declared name of Warsaw written or implied on each poster, painting, exhibition, or building commissioned by the state were networks of spatial, political, and art disciplines that generated forms.

Warsaw Lives Again adapted the political themes of *Warsaw Accuses* to American and British audiences. Like its parent, the exhibition emphasized the destruction of the Polish capital at German hands, showing a progression of images illustrating the city's historical progression. Early spreads in the archived catalogue are titled "Warsaw—16th century to 18th century," "Warsaw—1939," "Nazis arrival," with the final in this series showing a montage of a speculative plan and conceptual model under the words "Order Emerges."⁹ Where *Warsaw Accuses* stood in a museum and reflected the chaos outside, the mobile and iterative *Warsaw Lives Again* marched Warsaw toward an ordered future. As Stanisław Albrecht's catalogue essay explained, reconstructing Warsaw not only contested German actions against the Polish nation; it

also revised the “barbaric” capitalism that had engulfed the city during the “chaotic economic and social life in the nineteenth century.”¹⁰ Against the backdrop of the city’s now-destroyed bourgeois past, reconstructed Warsaw would emphasize “essential functions”: “political, economic, and cultural centers,” large public spaces to act as “a forum for national discussion,” civic pride through the “rich architectural experience” of Maciej Nowicki’s new Parliament building, and above all sufficient workers’ housing.¹¹ Political and social order became synonymous with the order of functionally defined zones. This sense of “order” was based on the functionalist planning principles of Helena and Szymon Syrkus, planners of the exhibition and important players in the broader reconstruction effort. They defined their plans years before the war even began, back when they were engaged in the Functional City debates of the CIAM. The traveling exhibition, therefore, advanced the couple’s architectural and ideological ambitions.

Stanisław Tolwiński, communist mayor of Warsaw from 1945 to 1950 and close friend of the Syrkuses, received updates from the Syrkuses and advised *Warsaw Lives Again* from back home in Warsaw.¹² From *Warsaw Accuses* to *Warsaw Lives Again*, politics was inherent to the dissemination of images. The exhibitions consolidated an egalitarian and functionally ordered version of the city, oriented its spatial layout to the agendas of the PZPR, and situated Poland within a brewing geopolitical confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Building Warsaw From Images: Tadeusz Trepkowski

Depicting the simple image of an anonymous ruined building within the outline of a falling bomb, the 1952 poster *Nie!* by Tadeusz Trepkowski is an emblem of the Stalinist

period. Designed for a World Peace Congress in Vienna that year, the poster was originally rejected. But in 1955, following Trepkowski's death from a heart attack, the poster appeared again, large-scale, on the façade of a building during Warsaw's 5th World Festival for Youth and Students. In white, all-caps letters against a blue sky gradient, the Polish word for "no"—NIE—sits just below a bomb's downward-pointing nose to represent the shrieking plea of its unfortunate recipients. While *Nie!* stands out for its compositional clarity, beauty, and abstraction as opposed to the Stalinist mandate of "realism," it is really just one iteration of Trepkowski's larger body of propaganda and commercial poster designs after 1945

In a situation that was *physically* fluid, where buildings were destroyed, scattered into debris, and reduced to basic units like bricks, Trepkowski's posters leveraged the aesthetic appeal of everyday building materials and structures. In a society that was becoming increasingly *politically* fluid—artists' works, especially after 1948, were heavily scrutinized for their adherence to the Communist regime—Trepkowski's propaganda messages negotiated their content (realistic and always declaring allegiance to power) with their action (abstract, experimental, imaginary compositions). Whether Trepkowski rendered "building" as an object or as the ongoing process of rebuilding, and whether it was represented in its damaged, destroyed, built, or rebuilt states, building was the focus of many of his posters. As Warsaw architects were converting the city's ruins into rubble for construction material, Trepkowski was appropriating these same ruins as images. Because posters depicted building while being affixed to buildings, their relationship to their environment was dialectical. In the years between 1945 and 1948, after the war and before the most intense years of Polish Stalinism, art sat between what

has been called “reconstruction euphoria”—the slew of opportunities to mediate the rebuilding of Warsaw and of Poland at-large—and “great trepidation”—increasing ideological pressure from the government.¹³ It was in this environment that propaganda and film posters, Trepkowski’s being characteristic, adorned and represented buildings.

Trepkowski was born in 1914 in Warsaw, where he would spend the rest of his life. Having foregone a high school diploma, he briefly studied at Warsaw’s City School for Decorative Arts but never graduated. He instead found jobs in commercial practice, designing advertising posters throughout the mid-1930s. He ended up finding employment with the government-run Institute of Public Affairs, where he created instructional posters on safe workplace practices. For his 1935 poster *Be Careful!*, he won first prize at an international poster competition in Paris in 1937.¹⁴ In 1939, after the war began, Trepkowski, like many artists, put his career on hold. In 1945 restarted it, designing anti-German propaganda posters and advertisements for the KRN’s Ministry of Rail Transport where his father was an executive.¹⁵ For nearly all of his postwar career, Trepkowski designed for the government-controlled State Arts and Graphics Publishers (WAG) and State Film Distributor (CWF).¹⁶

In a 1945 poster commission for WAG, Trepkowski produced *1939...It Will Never Repeat Itself*, evoking the memory of the German invasion and the initial bombing of Warsaw. A pair of flying Luftwaffe bomber planes hovered above the orange glow and wispy smoke of an ongoing aerial attack, with the destroyed skyline implied rather than visible. The three-dimensional numerals “1939” at the base of the poster sat slightly out-of-frame, appearing to shield the viewer from the explosion and flames beyond. The date was more than the poster’s title; connoting collective trauma as it denoted a specific date

and event. Generating tension through the destabilizing absence of the ground, the poster was one of many Trepkowski works to employ suspended objects above an ambiguous ground plane.

Also in 1945, Trepkowski produced *Come Back* and *Back in Warsaw*. Like *1939*, these posters employed the motif of the airborne object. Flying doves—the universal symbol of peace—beckoned Warsaw’s dispersed inhabitants home. Peace doves were beginning to frequent the graphic ephemera of World Peace Congresses and other Soviet propaganda efforts, with a noteworthy example in Pablo Picasso’s *La Colombe* lithograph at the 1949 Paris Congress.¹⁷ In *Come Back*, the dove led a small flock and held a Polish flag in its beak, appealing to a nationalist sentiment of unity. Combined with universal world peace, the dove became a specific metaphor of the Warsaw inhabitants who were returning to the city. In *Back in Warsaw*, words like “worker” and “PPS” tattooed the bird as it flew above the remains of a damaged house.¹⁸ A wisp of smoke escaped through a stove chimney as life returned.

In Trepkowski’s *Glory to the Liberators* poster of 1946, space defined the past, present, and future. The vantage point was inside a prison cell looking out through the shattered bars of the window, with Polish and Soviet flags visible in the distance. Poland’s liberation was here entangled with its Soviet friendship, the white-and-red Polish flag even standing behind the all-red Soviet flag. Poland was breaking free from the prison of Nazi occupation, and the Soviets were its liberators. Dividing the poster into multiple realities, a frame-within-a-frame, foreshadowed the strategy of *Nie!* six years later. As Trepkowski’s *Battle of Stalingrad* film poster showed, being commissioned by the CWF in 1950, the ruin’s propagandistic function could extend to commercial posters

as well. Furthermore, it was not confined to a specific geographic location, instead being mobile from place to place. The poster transported Warsaw's image from one genre of poster to another, and to the Soviet city of Stalingrad and back. Advertising Leonid Warlamow's Soviet film, the poster depicted a scene of destruction eerily similar to Warsaw. Stalingrad had been infamously destroyed in a German-Soviet battle in the winter of 1942. While the building shown in the poster was ostensibly anonymous, it clearly evoked Warsaw.

In 1952, the same year as *Nie!*, text again became spatial, although instead of gesturing towards Warsaw's ruination, it participated in the act of building. In the poster *Warszawa*, the Polish name for the capital city became a construction element. Echoing *1939*, the three-dimensional letters hovered above an unseen ground from the cables of a crane. Precariously dangling before the clear blue sky, Warsaw confronted gravity as well as military conflict. A peace dove stood at one end of the block of letters, implying an interdependency of rebuilding and peace. The poster inflected the reconstruction effort with the ensuing geopolitical confrontation between the Soviet Union and United States. In Trepkowski's *Socjalizm* from 1953, another word took shape in space, this time a popular slogan. However, socialism did not risk falling to the earth; in fact, it sat firmly on the horizon, a foundation composed of a massive crowd. Being positioned just in front of this horizon, socialism was both a present and future reality. Resting on the shoulders of the workers, a reference to Marxist superstructure and base was clear. Instead of Polish flags, Soviet flags were strewn throughout the crowd. *Socjalizm* beckoned toward a more specific space in Trepkowski's *Under Stalin's Standard, Forward to Socialism*, resonating with the soon-to-be-finished Palace of Culture and Science. The object on the

horizon line was a bust of Stalin, whose neck blurred into the crowd and caused him to “rise” from the workers. Instead of an abstract political concept, the poster evoked the specific identity of Stalin himself.

Posters and Paintings: A Building Tradition

Trepkowski was one of many artists who appropriated images of Warsaw’s destruction and reconstruction. For many posters artists who had not only survived the war but continued designing posters during it, the act of referencing the war in a poster design meant appropriating their own personal histories into it. A notable relic of the Second Warsaw Uprising was a 1944 entitled *In Battle, We Avenge the Blood of Thousands of Poles*, created in support of the Home Army’s efforts against the Germans. Under commission of the AK’s conspiratorial Bureau of Information and Propaganda, poster artist and resistance fighter Międza-Tomaszewski produced the design as an agitation measure to rally underground support for the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. Foreshadowing works by many painters and artists of the subsequent rebuilding period, the poster’s background was a bullet-ridden brick wall suggesting collective suffering, effort, and progress. At the moment of its deployment, the poster’s title was a rallying cry for participants in the Warsaw Uprising, uniting residents and members of the underground resistance efforts around the common cause of defeating the Germans. The brick wall in the background transitioned into the red Nazi flag, questioning whether Warsaw would remain a Polish city or fully succumb to the Germans. In front of it, six bayonets converged in preparation for the upcoming conflict. In this important agitation poster, architecture participated less as the subject of the author’s design and more as the

environment in which political actions took place.

After the Uprising and in the midst of the new regime, Międza-Tomaszewski produced two posters each entitled *We Will Rebuild Warsaw*. Like his battle poster from a year earlier, the posters were about creating unity for a common cause. But this time, instead of appealing to the avowed nationalist loyalties of the AK, Międza-Tomaszewski's posters spoke the language of rebuilding. The brick wall from the 1944 poster was reusable, although without the bullet holes. Adapting the poster's recognizability, Międza-Tomaszewski rendered a bright red and freshly troweled brick wall. The tools were no longer bayonets; they became a single trowel that promised to collectively build, brick-by-brick, a new Warsaw. In the other of the two *We Will Rebuild Warsaw* posters, a double skyline of Warsaw juxtaposed the city's ruined present condition in the foreground with the promise of an orderly future in the distance. The first-person plural version of "to rebuild" injected a sense of collective optimism around the name for Warsaw, which was marked by its passive case in Polish. In the other poster, the same words framed the center while standing out from the background.

The trowel in Międza-Tomaszewski's *We Will Rebuild Warsaw* posters recurred in other Stalinist-era posters and paintings, featuring boldly in Witold Chmielewski's *The Construction of Socialist Warsaw: A Work of Peace* in 1951. Against the background of the city's crane-dominated skyline and a peace dove flying behind it, an upright fist clenched a trowel in a salute to workers and builders. Synthesizing the raised fist with rebuilding, the trowel grounded Warsaw within the global workers' and peace movements.

Waldemar Świerzy loaded his *Month of Building Warsaw* poster from 1953 with

construction references, adapting the raised fist metaphor to a realistic image of a worker raising a single brick into the air, where a peace dove has chosen to perch. The worker, anonymous and clad in white, gazed admiringly at his work and the dove. A construction project, complete with cranes, waited in the background for his return. At the top of the poster, just beneath the title, was the written phrase *Cały naród buduje swoją stolicę* (The whole nation builds its capital), popular enough during the Stalinist period to be inscribed on the façades of buildings. In painterly quality, the poster echoed Trepkowski and Chmielewski by tying reconstruction to both the workers movement and the desire for world peace. Continuing a motif from Trepkowski's *Warszawa* and *Socjalizm*, the Świerzy poster leveraged a hierarchy in which peace relies on reconstruction and reconstruction relies on peace, in which the reestablishment, collectivization, and preservation of society rest precariously on workers.

Poster design closely related to painting, which also heavily exploited ruin and construction as motifs. One of the most recognizable Socialist Realist paintings was *Pass Me A Brick* (*Podaj cegłę*) by Aleksander Kobzdej from 1949. Creating a piece that would permanently inscribe itself into Polish national memory of art in the Stalinist period as well as result in the well-known phrase *Kopsnij cegłę*—also meaning “pass the brick” but also closely resembling the artist's name—Kobzdej depicted the strikingly banal scene of three bricklayers at work.¹⁹ The painting's sense of ordinariness, suggested by the realness of the scene, its anonymity, and its lack of a focal center, transformed everyday life into a collective act worthy of artistic elaboration.

Wojciech Fangor's painting *Figures* from 1950 assembled popular American tropes and Soviet ideals in an almost overwhelming composition that reinforced

juxtapositions between socialism and capitalism with a framework of construction and ruin imagery. Overlaying the oppositions of past and present, imperialism and communism, and genuine and superficial, the painting was ambiguously poster-like, just as its author so often worked ambiguously between painting, graphic design, and architectural disciplines. Three individuals stood in the painting's foreground, their common background bifurcated between ruins on the left and a new building on the right. In front of the ruins stood a solitary and awkwardly dressed woman, clutching her purse. Graffitied with names like "London," "Miami," "Coca-Cola," and "Wall Street," the woman's dress was just one aspect of her "westernness"—complete with oversized sunglasses, jewelry, painted fingernails, and lipstick—that contrasted the simply dressed couple to her right. As opposed to her solitude, this woman and man were clearly together—the taller man's hand rested paternalistically on the woman's shoulder. Exploiting negative attitudes toward the "west," Fangor pitted tropes of indulgent femininity and individualism against the Stakhanovite ideals.²⁰ Sophistication and weakness, reinforced by the solitary woman and the ruined building behind her, contrasted the authenticity and strength of the ideal man and woman on the right. The contrasts repeated in the background: ruins behind the western woman, a freshly completed building behind the worker couple. Capitalism rendered war and ruination. Socialism led to prosperity, community, and new buildings.

Building Warsaw For Imageability

In July 1949 Stalinist President Bolesław Bierut spoke to the Warsaw delegation of the Polish Communist Party, updating them on Warsaw's reconstruction progress and

its role in the country's economic future. A year later the speech was published in a photobook called *The Six-Year Plan for the Reconstruction of Warsaw*. In this publication, Bierut's speech was secondary to the arrangements of photographs, drawings, diagrams, and paintings throughout the rest of the photobook. The publication went to extreme lengths to embody Warsaw's past, present, and future, assembling both documentary and speculative images. It analyzed existing conditions, theorized the reasons for their formation, and projected ideas about the future. The images formed their own narrative, not dissimilar to the *Warsaw Lives Again* catalogue book from three years earlier, that went from the city's wartime death to its socialist renaissance. Employing photographs of destruction and reconstruction and combining these documentary objects with techniques from painting, the photobook edited the past and while it rendered the future. The veracity of photographs overlaid the utopian promises of drawings and paintings, blurring the boundary between imaginary and real. The differences between paintings and photographs were elusive, with strokes of paint embellishing shadows, adding scale figures, and correcting building ornaments that the photographers' cameras had apparently left out. True to Socialist Realism, in which art portrayed the "real" conditions of existing socialism, the photobook documented and promised at the same time. Whether the scenes in the photobook were real or imaginary, they compelled new meanings and physical spaces for the city. Workers' socialism triumphed, German aggression was defeated and its effects erased, and Poland was reconstructed peacefully and equitably. New civic monuments, public spaces, and infrastructure realized and promised to realize these potentials. The publication itself, formatted by an interdisciplinary team of architects, painters, and graphic designers, demonstrated how

propaganda united artistic disciplines and blurred media with the physical space of the city.

Six years later after this photobook version of Warsaw, the city had indeed transformed. In the thick summer heat of August 1955, at the 5th World Festival of Youth and Students, a host of new buildings, public spaces, and infrastructure populated Warsaw's cityscape and captured the interest of foreign visitors and photographers. Playing host to left-wing youth from around the globe who were uniting for world peace, the city became a parade ground, massive propaganda show, a vast urban exhibition of Warsaw's ruins and rebuilding progress. Photographers captured moments of friendship, solidarity, and love and took advantage of the stark juxtapositions that Warsaw's partially destroyed, partially rebuilt landscape offered. Sponsored by the London-based, Moscow-backed World Federation of Democratic Youth as well the Polish state, the festival advanced an anti-war, anti-imperialist message. Consistent with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's "peaceful coexistence" theory that socialist and capitalist countries were not necessarily contradictory, the event reflected a more tempered rivalry between the USSR and U.S. It allowed Khrushchev to pursue moral high ground, encouraging mutual understanding and diplomacy rather than economic and military confrontation. Along with neutral slogans like "no more war" on shirts and banners, references like "no more Hiroshimas" drew comparisons between destroyed Japanese cities and Warsaw.²¹

Following an indoor art exhibition called "Arsenal," which featured many Polish artists, the open-air exhibition began in the streets where thousands basked in the August heat. Parade Square became a massive public commons, the main location for festival activities. Poster designers, mural painters, and architects adorned the city, projecting

themes like youthfulness, solidarity, anti-war sentiment, the dangers of the atomic threat. Warsaw's curators understood the geopolitical stakes of their work. Socialist and antiwar themes, amplified by the city's partially destroyed landscape, leveraged space itself as propaganda. Festival attendees witnessed the city's past, present, and future unfold at the same time. Warsaw had and was history.

The artists and architects fitting out the city with images also created new buildings and spaces. Just east of the Vistula River in the city's Praga district, the new 10th Anniversary Stadium played host to festival rallies, sporting events, and the opening ceremony. Designed by Jerzy Hryniewiecki from Warsaw Polytechnic and Jerzy Sołtan and Zbigniew Ihnatowicz from the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, the bowl-shaped stadium was comprised of ruins from Warsaw's destruction that had been converted to structural fill material.²² Leading up to the stadium opening for the festival, Hryniewiecki worked on both the stadium and designs for banner scaffolding along Marszałkowska Street.

The stadium project was utilitarian, providing an anchor arena space that would serve Warsaw for years to come. But it was laced with ideological and geopolitical implications. Finished in July just a week before the festival began, it sat in the loamy earth just east of the Vistula River, with easy access to the Palace of Culture and Science and the city center. Its name evoked the history of communist power in Poland, formalized with the release of the "July Manifesto" in summer 1944 that proclaimed the legitimacy of the Soviet-backed Polish Committee of National Liberation. The half-buried structure rooted communism in Poland.

In the center of Warsaw, a newly opened Palace of Culture and Science anchored

the festival. The building, looming in the middle of Palace Square like a commemorative statue to Stalin, who had died in 1953, had an extensive view of the unfolding events of the festival. Marszałkowska Street and Aleje Jerozolimskie, bounding Parade Square to the east and south, visually framed the skyscraper with the milieu of banners, murals, and other visual ephemera mounted on their building façades and above their sidewalks. Festival-themed signs, flags, and reproductions of propaganda posters and paintings, stuck to scaffolding and even worn by attendees as festival scarves, put the scene into motion. Like the flurry of decorations that lined the streets and adorned the rough-looking, destroyed buildings nearby, the Palace reinforced the festival's atmosphere of juxtapositions. Affirming the postwar regime's reconstruction effort by inventing an entirely new, monumental spatial formation that usurped necessity, the building functioned as the semiotic opposite of destruction. Its massiveness and permanence, projected by stone materiality and an enormous form, were counterpoints to the festival's ephemeral environment of banners, murals, and visual spectacles.

Across Marszałkowska Street from the Palace of Culture and Science, at the corner with Świętokrzyska, Trepkowski's *Nie!* poster reappeared, being mounted to the façade of the bombed-out former headquarters building of PKO Bank. Here, the actually ruined building in the background became a featured part of *Nie!* as the shape of the bomb was cut-out. The poster adapted the antiwar omen of Trepkowski's original work to the festival. *Nie!* was perhaps the only reproduced poster at the festival serving the dual purposes of advancing the anti-war message and commemorating the death of its author; Trepkowski had died the year before, and this scaled-up *Nie!* commemorated his life and career. Other works presented at the event, too, leveraged the fame of their original

authors. Wojciech Fangor, the author of *Figures* from 1950 and professor in the Faculty of Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, recreated Pablo Picasso's famous Cubist painting *Guernica* as a temporary mural in front of a building at Marszałkowska and Królewska streets. Jerzy Hryniewiecki, who was simultaneously working with Jerzy Sołtan and Zbigniew Ihnatowicz on the 10th Anniversary Stadium across the river, designed the scaffolding that supported Fangor's mural. *Guernica*, of course, was already a recognizable symbol of the global anti-war campaign. In response to the small Basque town's violent destruction during the Spanish Civil War by nationalists and their fascists, Picasso had completed the painting in 1937. The painting's appearance in Warsaw in 1955 compared the small town to the Polish capital, conceiving of the same violent forces that had decimated the Basque region in the late 1930s as those that had devastated Warsaw by 1945. The Polish capital, as the mural suggested, was a massive *Guernica*. Picasso's presence at the 1955 festival went beyond *Guernica*. He designed a festival scarf for participants to wear during street gatherings, a peace dove in its center and the phrase "Peace for all nations" repeated around its border.²³ Participants wore scarves as they participated in sporting events, demonstrated for world peace, or simply walked around Warsaw.

Just south of Trepkowski's *Nie!* on Marszałkowska Street, Fangor, painter of the *Guernica* mural, and his fellow professor at ASPW, poster designer Henryk Tomaszewski, created a continuous, 400-meter-long peace banner adorned with peace doves, slogans like "let's build socialism," "friendship knows no borders," and "world peace," and a collage of recognizable global landmarks like the Eiffel Tower and Statue of Liberty. Along with other streamers like Hryniewicki's that read "We demand the

prohibition of nuclear weapons,” Fangor and Tomaszewski’s huge banner reinforced the event’s anti-war sentiment through a vocabulary of recognizable slogans. Rising above ruins, the banner transformed Warsaw’s ruins into a secondary framing aspect of the city’s mediated public space. It extended all the way along the east side of Parade Square, projecting the festival’s pacifist theme toward the tramline in the center of Marszałkowska Street. A line of national flags above the banner corresponded to the horizontal progression of countries on the banner’s graphics.²⁴ Jan Młodożeniec, a recent graduate of the ASPW’s Faculty of Graphics who studied under Tomaszewski, reproduced one of his posters on the face of a building Smolna Street and Aleje Jerozolimskie, facing off with Tomaszewski and Fangor’s banner.

The festival was a transitional moment in Polish cultural and political life, reflecting new desires for liberalization and global engagement.²⁵ In spite of the propagandistic aura of the festival, many attendees were genuinely interested in learning about each other. The festival, in this way, foreshadowed the Polish Thaw that would begin a year later, when political upheaval of 1956 would cause the PZPR and President Władysław Gomułka to take a more tempered approach to economic and social policy. The Thaw also confirmed the end of Socialist Realism as a force in art. Warsaw, moreover, was no longer a rumor of total destruction; it was a reality seen and appreciated, a recovery that was truly happening. Whereas in previous exhibitions Warsaw had traveled abroad, here the world came to Warsaw. While posters mediated Warsaw to the public through ephemeral images, here they and other media consolidated Warsaw as both an imagined and an actual place. Beyond narratives of a city reborn and triumphant socialism, it was clear that Warsaw was different things to different

individuals and institutions. It was not only a symbol, but also a text to be read on posters, in exhibition catalogues, and through the act of peering up at a temporary mural while walking down Marszałkowska Street. It was a physical and political space where artists experimented and prodded the boundaries of disciplines.

Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts

Painter Wojciech Fangor and poster artist Henryk Tomaszewski, faculty at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts who designed the 1955 festival's "banner of nations" along Marszałkowska, spanned their work between city streets and between graphics and architecture disciplines. The architects of the highly ideological 10th Anniversary Stadium, many of whom also taught at the ASPW, were architects and political operatives, professionals co-conspiring with the state in situating architecture as propaganda. The ASPW reflected this collaborative, interdisciplinary trend. "Art everywhere," a longstanding slogan of the ASPW, has been used to characterize its pedagogical milieu.²⁶ Dating to the academy's inception in 1904, the terms "fine arts" and "applied arts" were always ambiguously defined. The concept reflected a regard for design and art research in undiscovered places, a tendency to blur disciplinary boundaries between painting, graphic design, and spatial arts. Art was a fluid and evolving field of teaching and learning, a phenomenon tied to the unstable political environment of Poland in the early twentieth century where everyday life was viewed by many as art itself. After the war and during the Stalinist period from the late-1940s to the mid-1950s, the ASPW increasingly accommodated talented, underemployed, and alternative artists. With many faculty members also employed by government cultural bureaucracies, the ASPW

engaged a new set of interplays between politics and disciplines like painting, graphic design, sculpture, and architecture.

The interaction of graphic design and architecture through the media of posters, reflecting a trend toward the synthesis of arts, was especially active in Poland the Stalinist period. Posters occupied walls and street posts. Political demonstrations sponsored by the communist regime, such as the 1955 youth festival, were commercial opportunities for artists who stood to get commissions. What adds even more levity to Wojciech Fangor's anti-capitalist *Figures* painting is its lucrativeness. Fangor, an associate professor at the ASPW and producer of the main festival poster for the 1955 festival, once reflected, "visual propaganda was a great source of quick money. [...] It paid enormously because they calculated per square meter, and the lettering per letter. With that money I bought an apartment on Polna Street in Warsaw."²⁷

The Polish government's cultural bureaucracy after 1945 brought together architecture and other arts together in unique ways. The heavy-handed political regime, both censoring artists and hiring them for various propaganda projects, was an entity to both resist and exploit, depending on the situation. After the rigged legislative elections of fall 1947, various new bureaucratic apparatuses and professional organizations began to emerge under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Art (MKS). The Union of Polish Visual Artists (ZPAP), as the mainstream professional organization for artists, became a staple; in order to have access to government work, nearly every artist and architect had to join it.²⁸ Its internal organ for exhibition design, the Central Bureau of Exhibitions (CBW), connected artists to the MKS, which then commissioned them for propaganda material. The CBW later became the Central Bureau of Artistic Exhibitions

(CBWA), housed in the ASPW-affiliated Zachęta Art Gallery in Warsaw. Whether as an obstacle to or an opportunity to artistic practice, the Polish state in the years after the war was unavoidable.²⁹ Institutions were closely affiliated with one another, and there was always just one or two degrees of separation between one artist and the next.

As Tomasz Fudala has explained, commissions from the MKS and other government agencies allowed artists to work collaboratively and outside of convention. Government bureaus regarded artists as a reliable and relatively inexpensive source of temporary and permanent employment. For artists, the government often offered a kind of steadiness that freelance or independent work, often regarded as piecemeal and unambitious, could not offer.³⁰ Membership in professional unions like the ZPAP, commissions from MKS and CBWA, and jobs at institutions like the ASPW offered income stability and networks for collaboration.

Ideological pressure from authorities and extensive monitoring by government censors forced many artists out of conventional practice or work together. A notable example was Władysław Strzemiński, an avant-garde painter with an established reputation from his work during the interwar period, who was fired from his teaching position at the Visual Arts School in Łódź in 1950 for refusing to comply with socialist realism. Instead of accepting restrictions like other artists—or capitalizing on them, as with artists like Fangor—Strzemiński's refused to engage with Socialist Realism and found himself underemployed, unemployed, and finally sick and dying. Theater director and artist Tadeusz Kantor, from Chapter Four of this thesis, refused the mandate and initially met a similar fate as Strzemiński, only later salvaging his career.

Other artists who ran up against the mandate discovered a different fate. For

young architect and multimedia artist Oskar Hansen, whose indirect rejection of Socialist Realism in 1952 lost him his job, realized that a teaching was pretty much his only option. Being forced out of conventional practice, however, proved to be Hansen's greatest opportunity.³¹ After he was publicly reprimanded by architects Józef Sigalin and Szymon Syrkus for proposing a temporary Warsaw City Hall in 1952, Hansen had no choice but to retreat from public life, make paintings in the privacy of his home, and teach the Solids and Planes Studio at the ASPW's Faculty of Sculpture.³² This "hidden" period in his early career, during which he became an integral part of the academy's teaching community, was a moment of Miłosz's *ketman* that actually expanded Hansen's professional network and provided valuable space for experimentation. It could be argued that the ASPW facilitated Hansen's famous Open Form theory, which later emerged.³³

In 1952, exhibition designer Józef Mroszczak and future "banner of nations" designer Henryk Tomaszewski started a Faculty of Graphics at the ASPW, focusing on training for poster design. At the time, both worked for the MKS's graphics producers the CWF and WAG, previously discussed in relation to Tadeusz Trepkowski. The CWF had a monopoly on film distribution, selecting which domestic and foreign films could be shown and how they would be presented to the public. Obviously, film posters were a key part of this propaganda; Tomaszewski himself presented Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* and René Clair's *The Beauty of the Devil* to the Polish public. He and Mroszczak, as employees of the government, pedagogues at the ASPW, and stewards of their own careers, regularly contended with the fact that their work was monitored and censored while they themselves participated, as artists, in this very censorship process. Since the state was their authority and client, posters designers were simultaneously subjects and

agents of power. From their inception, Tomaszewski and Mroszczak's Graphics studios at the ASPW were closely aligned with the state, even taking the colloquial names "Propaganda Studios."³⁴

Tomaszewski, born and raised in Warsaw, got his start in the advertising industry in the mid-1920s, training at the city's Graphics and Print Industry School.³⁵ He attended the ASPW in the 1930s and worked as a cartoonist during the war years. Like many poster designers, he put his skills to use for the war effort, taking as a client the far-right Camp of National Unity political party in late 1939 with an agitation poster calling for national retaliation against the German and Soviet invaders. He ended up in Łódź after the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, getting his start in posters in Poland's film capital. In the late 1940s he returned to Warsaw to work for the WAG, designing posters with a variety of reconstruction, anti-German, and anti-imperialist themes. His colleague Mroszczak, on the other hand, was from the rural south of Poland and trained at Kraków's School of Decorative Arts before attending the ASPW. He lived in Silesia during the war, teaching advertising theory in Katowice before working in the Silesian coal industry afterward. He returned to the Polish capital for the ASPW, seeing the unique promise of the school's collaborative environment and its proximity to government commissions. Warsaw was, for these poster designers, not only an image of destruction and rebuilding; it was also a symbol of power and opportunity.

For Tomaszewski, whose succinct yet spirited film posters always tried "to find the essence of the film," politics was always present in his work but never controlled it. "I was trying to feel the impression that the film had on me, whether it was a lyrical film, comedy, drama, sport or war film. I wanted to illustrate this essence with my own

language, in my own way.”³⁶ Tomaszewski did not separate the imperative to comply with the government from the possibility to experiment or make cultural references, even taking advantage of the censors’ ignorance: “We all agreed that [the CWF] should not expect us to design anything that resembled Japanese, American, Russian, or Swiss posters.” His client was more interested in *what* posters said than *how*. As long as content was acceptable, composition could vary.

Essentially a public-private partnership to ensure a pipeline of graphic design talent from the ASPW to the MKS, the Propaganda Studios prepared students for work with the Polish state. Since posters carried messages to the public, graphic design education focused on reducing compositions to their essences. Brevity was an asset when one was mediating the desires of the state along with the subjects of each individual film. As Tomaszewski explained,

I try to educate my students to think logically, consistently, and functionally about their project. I will give a topic, which by way of analysis the student then rids of anything unnecessary and discovers the simplest solution—a sign. By sign, I mean the abbreviation of form, the abbreviation of the message. I get them used to giving up judgement, elaboration and everything beautiful, especially unnecessary ornament.³⁷

Tomaszewski’s teaching approach was to begin with a complex idea—or “riddle,” as he called it—and make the students, who relied on their own process of elimination, reduce from there. “There is a big nothing and a little nothing,” as he might begin, confusing the students. “And then I ask for them to draw me something that follows that. [...] In each task there is a sort of puzzle that they must solve.”³⁸ Subjectivity was reconciled with the objective task, reducing posters to their elements through each artist’s interpretation of “necessary” and “extraneous.”

In the early 1950s, nearly concurrent with the start of the Graphics program, the ASPW started a Faculty of Interior Architecture program that was closely tied to the

existing Faculty of Sculpture. Two important figures here were Oskar Hansen and Jerzy Sołtan, architects who had received their formative training in the architecture school of the long-established Warsaw Polytechnic and had broken tradition by joining the ASPW and pursuing unconventional practice.³⁹ Hansen, as previously mentioned, had joined the Faculty of Sculpture in 1950 and began teaching the Solids and Planes Studio in 1952. His teaching methods often straddled the line between sculpture and architecture, with his students learning to model mobility in space through “active negatives” and to create dynamic forms through studio games. Hansen often collaborated with others at the ASPW, especially Sołtan and Wojciech Fangor. His very first exhibition design, in fact, was a collaboration with Sołtan on a traveling Folk Art exhibition, commissioned by the MKS.⁴⁰ He and Sołtan were polyglots, able to travel beyond Poland and interact with artistic circles outside the Soviet Bloc. Sołtan left Warsaw in 1959 to join the faculty of the Harvard Graduate School of Design, moving to the United States permanently in 1968 for an endowed GSD professorship. But the ASPW remained Hansen’s main employment throughout his life, providing stability in the midst of many ambitious and well-traveled projects.

In 1954, at the behest of ASPW director Marian Wnuk, Sołtan began a working group called the Arts and Research Workshops (ZAB).⁴¹ Its purpose was to design exhibitions and traveling pavilions for the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade (PIHZ), controlled by the Ministry of Foreign Trade (MŻHZ). Echoing his collaboration with Hryniewiecki and Ihnatowicz on the 10th Anniversary Stadium that opened for the youth festival in 1955, Sołtan worked in the mid- and late-1950s with ASPW-affiliated architects, artists, and even engineers to create multimedia, multisensory pavilions and

spaces. Among other projects, they designed the interior of Center City Train Station in Warsaw, the Polish Pavilion for the 1958 Brussels World Fair, and the “Warszawianka” sports complex. The ZAB was a vector across which architects like Sołtan and Hansen expanded the scope and breadth of their work with the support of the state. As the ASPW’s Graphics program worked with propaganda and film advertising agencies, the ZAB incubated an interplay between trade bureaus and ASPW artists.

Building Warsaw in Brussels: Polish Pavilion for Expo ‘58

Following the 1955 festival that brought the world’s attention to Warsaw, Warsaw traveled abroad again—or at least planned to—in the form of the Polish pavilion for the 1958 World’s Fair in Brussels. Returning to the broadcast tactics of *Warsaw Lives Again*, the Polish pavilion for Expo ’58 brought together artists and other professionals to create a multimedia experience envisioning new forms of civic participation and nation-building. The impetus for the publicly-funded pavilion was obviously political. It offered the PZPR and its bosses in Moscow a way to demonstrate that Stalinism was over and that Poland had entered a new era.⁴² Over 41 million visitors attended the Brussels fair during its tenure from April to October 1958. The first World’s Fair after the Second World War, it offered the Polish state a means to project its post-Stalinist identity to the world: a Poland now actively participating in the global order, advancing technology and championing human rights, and encouraging international cooperation and peace. Such a public relations effort was worth it, even if the process was expensive or meant temporarily exporting the country’s best artistic and technological talent.⁴³

Starting in 1956, two ZAB teams—led by Sołtan and Hansen, respectively—made

proposals. Hansen's team, comprised of his wife Zofia Garlińska, Lech Rosiński, Zofia Antosiak, and several others, conceived of a series of shell-like fabric roof modules to comprise the pavilion, which would perch lightly on the ground and generate a system of in-between spaces where exhibition activities would occur. The idea was to involve occupants in the process of building, enabling them to place the cylindrical roof sections, duplicate building elements and exhibition objects, and expand the structure across the landscape. The roof would weave into and out of floor elements, making the pavilion indecipherable as a ceiling or a floor. As Hansen would describe in his theory of Open Form in 1959, where spatial form was not was not a static object but a set of spatial relationships, the pavilion was conceived as a "sum of events, [...] the sum of individualities of a given group" that led "to the expression of a group form."⁴⁴ The endlessly expanding Hansen proposal, confronted with the fact that each pavilion would have a defined parcel of land, did not advance very far in the competition, however; it received an honorable mention.⁴⁵

Sołtan's team won. Painter Wojciech Fangor, structural engineer Lech Tomaszewski, musician Stanisław Skrowaczewski, and film producer Ludwik Perski worked with Sołtan on the final stage of the design and planned a trip to Brussels until the entire process was brought to halt by political scandal in 1957.⁴⁶ The apparent "wastefulness" of the project, with its costs expected to top 100 million Polish złotys, generated significant public pressure on the Gomułka regime that was in power. The administration, embroiled in the nation's acute economic problems, decided to nix the project. The pavilion never materialized.⁴⁷

Had it been implemented, however, the Polish pavilion would have developed or

projected several narratives about Polish socialism and nationhood. One was an ideal of social tranquility, political neutrality, and world peace accomplished through civic participation. Echoing the 1955 festival, Cold War atomic fears and their rootedness in Poland's experience during the Second World War underlaid the pavilion's vision of a new society in which constituent parts—citizens—wielded the agency to improve it. Accomplished through the exhibition's content and by engaging the physical site as part of rather than a background for the exhibition, the pavilion allowed trees to poke through it. Another narrative had to do with technological innovation, accomplished by a widespread deployment of glass and a sophisticated structural strategy. This was followed by yet another narrative, based on a politics of humanism. Each visitor became an aspect of the exhibition's—and therefore, Poland's—process of becoming. They operated the moving parts of the pavilion, just as Hansen's proposal had imagined, making them co-conspirators in the creation of Poland's future.⁴⁸ Fitting the fair's theme of "A New Humanism" that tasked the individual with collectively producing a better world, Sołtan's team enlisted visitors to make Poland.⁴⁹

Sołtan coordinated the overall pavilion design. Tomaszewski designed the roof, a broad and visibly weightless structure that brought the entire site—trees and all—into the pavilion. Skrowaczewski created musical pieces to accompany films by Perski, all to be synchronized on four massive cinema screens. Fangor curated paintings, locating them throughout the pavilion and creating a massive mural on the curtain wall. Covering the entire allotted site at Brussels' Heysel Park, the pavilion would have two main parts: an open-air entrance and the covered pavilion itself. For the roof that would unite the parts of the pavilion, Tomaszewski began with the basic building block of a tetrahedral unit,

but after running estimates on the structural loading, evolved it to a crystalline shape.⁵⁰

Physically integrated with natural processes and laws of physics, the pavilion was capable of adapting to, instead of existing despite, any changes in the surroundings.

Invoking fellow ZAB member Oskar Hansen's theory of Open Form, Sołtan's proposed pavilion would allow "the individual to find himself in the collective."⁵¹ With Tomaszewski's space-frame roof overhead, the pavilion would be supported by a handful of steel stakes to give as much freedom of movement as possible to the occupants. The wave-like glass curtain wall would allow complete visibility, demonstrating transparency and technological prowess. The ground floor had most of the paintings, posters, and audiovisual screens, while the mezzanine level connected visitors to the elevated walkway that continued throughout the rest of Heysel Park. As David Crowley has pointed out, the loose arrangement of spaces suggested that they could be "recomposed by the movement of the viewer."⁵² The four concave cinema screens, presenting Perski's film footage of everyday life in Poland, would accompany Skrowaczewski's electro-acoustic sounds. Since the pavilion was never built, the films and music were never produced. Early proposal notes suggested several schemes: "on work (for instance on mining safety), on individual life (perhaps on free time), on intellectual life (perhaps on Dunikowski's sculpture, as well as on body culture (for instance on the Peace [Bicycle] race)."⁵³ The multimedia experience would engage the senses—sight, sound, and touch—and make visitors feel as though they were physically part of the film.

Fangor took over the plans for the undulating glass curtain wall on the southern edge of the pavilion. Here, the proposed painting would present a Polish narrative of change. One scheme presented a teleological view of human development from violence

and barbarism to solidarity and peace.⁵⁴ It began on one end with fighters and death, through a series of abstract figures of workers and laborers, ending in a circle of people around the symbol of the cosmos. With a national flag alongside images like peace doves, hammers, and sickles, the narrative was both Polish and socialist.

One of the team's exhibition scenarios, written during project development, echoed a geopolitical narrative present at the 1955 Festival of Youth and Students and even back at *Warsaw Accuses*: "Poland lies on the route of great roads: East-West. In the time of war, those are the routes of destruction and annihilation. In the time of peace, those are the routes of trade, culture and progress. Poland's fate is therefore naturally bound with world peace."⁵⁵ Scenes of building, cooperation, and other forms of social progress converged in cosmic unity and peace, creating a narrative that explained Poland's journey since the end of the war.⁵⁶

Although Sołtan's pavilion did not fully reflect conditions on the ground back home, the project demonstrated an important change in the attitude of the Polish state toward exhibition design. As Hansen later reflected on the ZAB's exhibition design efforts: "designers' efforts went towards making the pavilion more attractive, more interesting, and towards creating a favorable BACKGROUND for a large number of visually uninteresting exhibits."⁵⁷ Just as many of Hansen and Sołtan's exhibitions throughout the 1950s contended with a paucity of compelling, well-developed content, the Polish pavilion at Expo '58 was more about imagining Poland as it *could be* rather than as it was.

Whether in pavilions, posters, photobooks, or the entire city of Warsaw, Polish exhibition practices after 1945 emerged from their context: physical conditions of

widespread destruction, political conditions of the new communist regime, and trends toward integrated arts. From *Warsaw Accuses* in 1945, to the 1955 World Festival of Youth and Students, to the planned Polish Pavilion for Expo '58, the work mediating Warsaw to the world demonstrated the limitations and opportunities that artists encountered and leveraged. Warsaw—a physical place, visual symbol, and political entity—facilitated interplays between the fields of poster design, architecture, painting, and other visual arts. Documents like *The Six-Year Plan for the Reconstruction of Warsaw* or Trepkowski's *Nie!* poster blurred images into real spaces and artistic disciplines into each other. Events, whether traveling exhibitions or youth festivals, took Warsaw abroad and brought the world home. Government institutions like the Ministry of Culture and pedagogical institutions like the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts provided spaces and funding support for a variety of disciplines to interact and benefit from each other and the state.

¹ Guidebook to the exhibition *Warsaw Accuses*, arranged by the Bureau for the Reconstruction of the Capital together with the National Museum in Warsaw, Warsaw: Minister of Culture and Art: 1945), 23-24. A version is also cited in Magdalena Komornicka, "Warsaw Accuses Exhibition at the National Museum in Warsaw," *Just After the War* eds. Joanna Kordjak and Agnieszka Szewczyk (Warsaw: Zachęta National Gallery of Art, 2018), 33.

² The KRN's Ministry of Cultural Affairs, who backed *Warsaw Accuses* and *Warsaw Lives Again*, was the precursor to the Ministry of Culture and Art of the communist-led coalition government that emerged from the rigged 1947 legislative elections.

³ Komornicka, "Warsaw Accuses," in *Just After the War*, 33.

⁴ Stanisław Albrecht, *Warsaw Lives Again!* Exhibition catalogue. Trans. Tomar Green and Aleksy Czerwinski (Washington: Library of Congress Committee on Exhibition, 1946), 4.

⁵ Tomasz Fudala, "Architects on the Fringe: Polish Exhibition Design After 1945," in *Oskar Hansen, Opening Modernism: On Open Form Architecture, Art and Didactics* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art Warsaw), 172.

⁶ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 116-120. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was the Nazi-Soviet agreement to invade and re-partition Poland.

⁷ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 63.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Albrecht, *Warsaw Lives Again*. See Chapter 3.

¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹¹ Ibid., 13-14.

¹² Helena and Szymon Syrkus. *Helena and Szymon Syrkus to Stanisław Tolwiński*, May 4 1946. Letter. Reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM: Listy Heleny Syrkus*, eds. Aleksandra Kędziorek. (Warsaw: National Institute of Architecture and Urbanism, 2019), 199.

¹³ Kordjak and Szewczyk, "Just After the War," in *Just After the War*, exhibition catalogue, 5.

¹⁴ Sylwia Giżka, "Tadeusz Trepcowski," 2006. trans. Patryk Grabowski 2018. Adam Mickiewicz Institute <<https://culture.pl/en/artist/tadeusz-trepcowski>> Accessed December 3, 2020.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ WAG: Wydawnictwo Artystyczno Graficzne. CWF: Centrala Wynajmu Filmów.

¹⁷ *Dove* (La Colombe), lithograph, Pablo Picasso, 1949. Source: Tate Museum, <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/picasso-dove-p11366>> Accessed February 9, 2021.

¹⁸ PPS stands for the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna).

¹⁹ Wiktor Komorowski, "Red Trauma: Aleksander Kobdziej's Informel and the Challenge of Stalinist Past" in *Brief Encounters*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 2018), 78.

²⁰ The Stakhanovite movement emerged in the Soviet Union in the 1930s but was widely appropriated by Soviet-influenced countries like Poland. The idea of the movement was to model one's work ethic after Alexey Stakhanov, a Soviet miner who had earned fame through productivity and commitment to the workers' movement.

²¹ 5th International Youth Festival in Warsaw, Pathé. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMW9hCBqrrM>>

²² The design continued the embedded bowl tradition of dome projects like the Yale Bowl in New Haven (1914), the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum (1923), and Michigan Stadium in Ann Arbor (1927).

²³ Gzregorz Kowalski, Maryla Sitkowska, et al, *Powinność i Bunt: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie 1944-2004* (Warsaw: Zachęta Gallery of Art, 2004), 170.

²⁴ Kowalski et al, *Powinność*, 167.

²⁵ Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (New York: Doubleday, 2012), 446-447.

²⁶ Maryla Sitkowska, "Introduction," *Art Everywhere: Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw 1904-1944*. eds. Jola Gola, Maryla Sitkowska, and Agnieszka Szewczyk. (Warsaw: Academy of Fine Arts Warsaw, 2012), 13.

²⁷ Quoted in Ibid.

²⁸ Fudala, "Architects Fringe," in *Oskar Hansen*, 176.

²⁹ Julia Leopold, "The Central Bureau of Artistic Exhibitions" in *Just After the War* exhibition catalogue, 32.

- ³⁰ Fudala, "Architects Fringe," in *Oskar Hansen*, 175.
- ³¹ Fudala, "Architects Fringe," in *Oskar Hansen*, 176.
- ³² Refer to Chapter 5.
- ³³ For Oskar Hansen's 2004 interview with Joanna Mytkowska in which he described the beginning of his career following the rejection of his Warsaw City Hall and his participation in international trade fairs, see Oskar Hansen and Jola Gola, *Toward Open Form: Oskar Hansen*. (Warsaw: Foksal Gallery Foundation, 2005), 14.
- ³⁴ Agnieszka Szewczyk, "The Studio of Henryk Tomaszewski," in Kowalski et al, *Powinność*, 228. In Polish, Pracowni Projektowania Grafiki Propagandowej.
- ³⁵ Dorota Folga-Jauszewska and Majewski, *The Art of Polish Poster* (Warsaw: Bosz, 2018), 172.
- ³⁶ Cited in MoMA exhibit Polish Posters 1945-89, May-November 2009. Museum of Modern Art. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/5000?artist_id=5894&page=1&sov_referrer=artist> Accessed February 2, 2021.
- ³⁷ Kowalski et al, *Powinność*, 229.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Jola Gola, "Two Myths," 1994. In *Jerzy Sołtan, A Monograph*, ed. Jola Gola (Warsaw and Cambridge: Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and Harvard Graduate School of Design), 18.
- ⁴⁰ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 180.
- ⁴¹ Jola Gola, "Sztuka przestrzeni," in *Powinność*, 150. In Polish, Arts and Research Workshops is Zakłady Artystyczno-Badawcze, Chamber of Foreign Trade is Polska Izba Handlu Zagranicznego, and Ministry of Trade is Ministerstwo Żeglugi i Handlu Zagranicznego.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Aleksandra Kędziorek, "Jerzy Sołtan and the Art and Research Unit's project for the Polish pavilion at Expo 58," *Team 10 East. Revisionist Architecture in Real Existing Modernism*, ed. Łukasz Stanek (Museum of Modern Art Warsaw, 2014), 109.
- ⁴⁴ Oskar Hansen, "The Open Form in Architecture—The Art of the Great Number," 1959, in *New Frontiers in Architecture: CIAM '59 in Otterlo*. ed. Oscar Newman (New York: Universe Books Inc., 1961), 190-191.
- ⁴⁵ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 186.
- ⁴⁶ David Crowley, "Humanity Rearranged: The Polish and Czechoslovak Pavilions at Expo 58," *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, Vol.19, Nr. 1 (2012), 88-105.
- ⁴⁷ Kędziorek, "Sołtan Expo 58," 114.
- ⁴⁸ Crowley, "Humanity Rearranged," 99.
- ⁴⁹ "Expo 1958 Brussels, At A Glance," Bureau International des Expositions <<https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/1958-brussels>> Accessed February 1, 2021.
- ⁵⁰ Kędziorek, "Sołtan Expo 58," 111.
- ⁵¹ Hansen, "Open Form," *New Frontiers*, 190.
- ⁵² Crowley, "Humanity Rearranged," 100.
- ⁵³ Cited in Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Crowley, "Humanity Rearranged," 101.
- ⁵⁵ Excerpt from Sołtan project description, cited in Kędziorek, "Sołtan Expo 58," 111.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 137.

Chapter 2

Warsaw Lives Again, Abroad: Matthew (Maciej) Nowicki

Just before midnight on August 31, 1950, Trans World Airlines Flight 903 from Cairo to Rome took off and began its ascent over the Egyptian desert. Shortly into the redeye flight that was due in Rome at 5:30 the next morning, the plane's number 3 engine failed and caught fire, crippling the aircraft. Sensing that the situation was dire, the flight crew turned around to head back to Cairo. But when the malfunctioning engine detached altogether from the plane, rendering the return option untenable, they attempted to ditch the plane in the dark and uncharted expanse of the desert below. Their maneuver unfortunately failed, and Flight 903 crashed 65 miles north of Cairo, killing all 55 passengers and crew aboard. Most bodies were burnt beyond recognition. One individual aboard the doomed flight was Polish-American architect Matthew Nowicki, connecting from a business trip in India to his home in Raleigh, North Carolina. His wife, Stanisława, and two young sons, Paul and Peter, were awaiting his return. At just 40 years old, Nowicki perished that night, bringing an untimely end to his life and career.

The crash of Flight 903 devastated the world of aviation, being one of the highest death tolls ever for a Lockheed L-749A aircraft. Nowicki's death devastated the world of architecture too. In addition to designing the new Indian city of Chandigarh, he was acting head of the Department of Architecture at North Carolina State College (NCSC). The chancellor of that university, J.W. Harrelson, soon expressed his sadness to the press: "His coming to America from Poland was this nation's gain, and his coming to the State College was our gain. We will miss him."¹ Wallace Harrison and Max Abramowitz, Nowicki's collaborators on the United Nations Headquarters Building a few years earlier,

sent their regards, saying that his “death deprives the world of one of the most brilliant young men in the architectural profession.”²

Nowicki’s former Pratt Institute colleague Philip Johnson announced plans to open an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art to feature drawings and photographs of Nowicki’s ongoing projects in India, North Carolina, New York, and California. In the exhibition press release, the writer (and probably Nowicki’s closest friend of all) Lewis Mumford wrote that “few architects anywhere could match him. [...] Those who know Nowicki’s work intimately, who can estimate his potentialities as well as his performances, have no doubt that he bore within him the seed of a new age.”³ One of Nowicki’s young students reflected: “It was like a good chunk of the world had disappeared.”⁴ But because of Nowicki’s strained relationship with his native Poland, there were no public condolences sent from back home.

The tension between the unfulfilled promise of Nowicki’s career and his strained relationship with Poland pervades his role in the history of the architectural profession. Projecting forward in time, the tension manifests in Nowicki’s adventures throughout the world, from his teaching career at NCSC to his most well-known design project, the livestock pavilion at the North Carolina State Fairgrounds (known today as Dorton Arena). These projects had to be completed after his death and under the guidance of other architects and engineers). Nowicki’s work with urban planner Albert Mayer on the new city of Chandigarh was taken over by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret with their design team. Nowicki’s frequent partner in Raleigh, William Dietrick, finished the drawings and the construction phase of the livestock pavilion at the North Carolina State Fairgrounds.

But incompleteness and unfinished business shrouds Nowicki's past as well. His name at birth was Maciej. Born a Polish citizen in 1910 and growing up in the formative years of the Second Polish Republic, he was educated at Poland's flagship architecture school, Warsaw Polytechnic, fought in the Second World War for the Polish Home Army, and spent the year 1945 designing the Polish capital, Warsaw, anew. These experiences, disconnected by renounced citizenship and the Atlantic Ocean, nevertheless bore heavily on Nowicki's later work. In this chapter, 1945 is a reference point for an interrupted career, for an immigrant with unfinished business back home, for an architect whose humanism informed his work wherever he went.

Unlike other architects who lived long enough to ponder the historical significance of their work with admirers and critics, Nowicki's early death means that he is studied from the distance of both history and the "what-ifs" of unrealized potential. This even manifests in the way Nowicki's friend Lewis Mumford, who wrote a series of biographical sketches on him in 1954, positioned Nowicki's experience in Poland as preparation for his later work abroad.⁵ In this chapter, however, incompleteness begins in the context of Warsaw in the summer and fall of 1945. Devastation and Nowicki's response to it in the form of writings and drawings provide a framework in which the difficult choices that he later made—to leave Poland for a temporary diplomatic position in the United States, then to remain in the United States with his young family instead of returning—become thresholds to Warsaw's afterlife, versions of Nowicki's architecture reimagined in new spatial, cultural, and political contexts that provide speculative insight about futures that the Polish capital might have otherwise had.

A Previous Life

Nowicki was born in 1910 into a wealthy family of Polish noble descent (*szlachta*) who were living at the time in Chita, Siberia. After returning to Poland during the First World War, his father Zygmunt became Head Consul of the Polish Consulate in Chicago. With his father working in this diplomatic capacity, Nowicki lived in Chicago from 1920 to 1925, from the age of 12 to 15. Once the family returned to Poland, Nowicki grew up in Warsaw and at the family estate just outside Kraków. Nowicki was fluent in English from his time in Chicago; from independent studies back in Poland, he also knew French. Although his father's politics was populist, and he grew up in close proximity to the nationalist politics of the early Second Polish Republic, Nowicki's experience abroad made him multilingual and cosmopolitan.⁶

Having begun to take drawing classes at the Art Institute of Chicago, Nowicki carried his interest in art to Wojciech Gerson School of Fine Arts in Warsaw and August Witkowski High School in Kraków.⁷ Enrolling in 1928 at the School of Architecture at Warsaw Polytechnic, he undertook what he later called the “progressive type of education” of the German Bauhaus.⁸ Because of internships and collaboration with his mentor Rudolf Świerczynski, Nowicki graduated from the Polytechnic in 1936, after nearly eight years of study.⁹ He would later emulate and then critique the school's technical and engineering-based curriculum when he and his wife Stanisława (another graduate of Warsaw Polytechnic) designed a new curriculum for the School of Design at North Carolina State College.

Nowicki's projects from before the war reflected his Polytechnic education and the influence of Świerczynski's mentorship. He designed a home for his parents in 1930

that bore the influence of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye and Rietveld's Schröder House.¹⁰ Although Świerczynski had received his own formative training at Warsaw's Academy of Fine Arts, associated with avant-garde figures Helena and Szymon Syrkus, and even participated from time to time in International Congress of Modern Architects meetings, he was generally a conservative designer with symmetrical and technically precise compositions.¹¹ Most of Świerczynski's projects were large institutional buildings around the Warsaw region. Nowicki assisted him on many of them, notably the National Farming Bank Building along Aleje Jerozolimskie on which he wrote a review in the design journal *Arkady* in 1936.¹² While this subdued architecture contrasts the structural expressiveness of Nowicki's later visions for the Polish parliament building, livestock pavilion in Raleigh, and Punjab Assembly Hall in Chandigarh, the technical precision he learned at the Polytechnic and in working with Świerczynski came to bear on his ability to synthesize architecture and engineering.

Frequent collaboration with Stanisława Sandecka, a fellow Polytechnic student and graphic designer who he would marry in 1938, helped Nowicki gain experience in poster design as well. Alone and with Stanisława, he designed advertisements for The Young Architecture Ball, a cleaning company, and the Polish Anti-Tuberculosis Association, to name a few. The Sandecka-Nowicki graphic partnership, demonstrating the couple's multiple talents and ability to move between artistic mediums, would later be reflected in projects like their design for the cover of the NCSC curriculum booklet, their illustrations for an American book on Polish arts and crafts in 1949,¹³ and their design of a floral curtain and furniture print called "Meadow" for the Carolina Country Club in Raleigh in 1950.¹⁴

Nowicki's career expanded after his graduation from the Polytechnic in 1936. In addition to being hired as an instructor and an assistant to Świerczyński at the Polytechnic, he began designing architecture and posters with Stanisława. From 1937 to 1939 he collaborated with Zbigniew Karpiński on a sports complex for the Orzeł Warszawa athletic club, simultaneously working with Stanisława on a resort hotel in Augustów in Poland's northeastern Podlaskie region. The couple was involved in proposals for a Polish Pavilion at the 1939 World Exposition in New York, just before the war began in September. This early period in Nowicki's career paralleled the increasingly tumultuous atmosphere in Polish society during the late 1930s, as anti-Semitism and political upheaval reached acute states. Polish-Jewish professor Szymon Syrkus at the Polytechnic, a fellow instructor of Nowicki, was demoted from his role as vice president of the Polish Association of Architects (SARP) in 1937. Nowicki was an instructor at the Polytechnic when "ghetto benches" were initiating, separating Jewish students from everyone else.¹⁵ Nowicki, in his 1936 capstone thesis at the Polytechnic, had designed a new headquarters building for the SARP, Poland's professional architecture organization that barred Jews with the addition of an "aryan paragraph" to its membership requirements in April 1939.¹⁶

Although the Nazi invasion in 1939 brought Nowicki's practice to a halt, he was able to maintain employment during the war as a bricklaying instructor for the German's "Warsaw School of Building Trades" and a lecturer at the Polytechnic's secret architecture studios.¹⁷ He served in the Home Army, spending part of the war as an anti-aircraft artilleryman in the Kampinos forest just to the west of Warsaw. There in the village of Laski, Nowicki found work designing a chapel, campus entry gate, and other

projects for the Laski School for the Blind. Returning to Warsaw in 1945, he left these projects incomplete; they would be finished after Nowicki emigrated to the United States, when he mailed the drawings back to Poland.¹⁸

The stifling of the Laski projects speaks to the way that the war interrupted Nowicki's work, producing a recurring desire to find "stability" in architectural practice and form:

In many European cities during the occupation University schools functioned as underground agencies, persecuted by the military and Gestapo authorities. The schools of architecture were not exception and this part of their life forms a separate interesting but a very bitter chapter. The destruction of treasured monuments of the past, the professed need for replacing them with others that could stand as well the criticisms of coming and changing ages might justify a trend of a search for stability of architectural form.¹⁹

His unfinished business in Poland, halted first by the invasion in 1939 and then by Nowicki's departure to the United States at the end of 1945, echoed in various ways in his work, in places as far away as India and in programs as culturally different as a country club in Raleigh.

In liberated 1945 Warsaw, Nowicki was appointed to a research group called the Studio for Architectural Discussions, part of the larger, government-funded Office for the Reconstruction of the Capital (BOS).²⁰ Nowicki's studio discussed and designed the future of Warsaw, documenting its works through writings in the architecture journal *Warszawska Skarpa*. Nowicki contributed three essays—"In Search of A New Functionalism," "On The Art of Moderation," and "The Socialization of Architecture"—engaging a broader discourse on the roles of form and function in the reconstruction of the city. Graphic and written works by others, including such names as architect Zygmunt Skibniewski and artist Wanda Telakowska, often directly referenced Nowicki and the important influence of his ideas.

In addition to his work with the Studio for Architectural Discussion and *Warszawska Skarpa*, Nowicki made reconstruction proposals for sections of the city, including a new Grzybów district in the area of the former Jewish ghetto, a general plan for a new Warsaw business district, and a civic building network featuring a new Parliament building along the Vistula River escarpment. Most of the work was collaborative, integrating Nowicki's personal stakes in Warsaw with the collective imperative to rebuild. Nearly four years later, Nowicki would explain that Polish nationalism was a political force in the Warsaw reconstruction effort, even as the country was transitioning to communism:

Nationalism on the defensive becomes aggressive in its love for the past, the glamour of the gone days, the traditions of history. Whether the need for housing, improving standards of everyday life, the planned growth of new communities will be inspired by freshness and youth that the old continent experienced time and again in the life span of its culture, or whether the drama of old memories and new tensions will have an upper hand, future only can tell.²¹

Previous to the Studio for Architectural Discussion, Nowicki had never designed on the scale of an entire city. Working with Świerczyński on large office and institutional buildings throughout Warsaw or with Stanisława and others on buildings designs had largely involved limited spatial extents and small political stakes, since clients were usually private businesses or municipalities. But here in 1945, with destruction all around and as far as one could see, there was no way to design without considering the entirety of Warsaw or the city's political significance in the wider nation. Warsaw was the largest and most consequential project he would ever encounter.

Nowicki's proposal for the new Warsaw business district, created with a team, demonstrated this challenge on the charged site of the former Jewish ghetto. Aimed at addressing the necessity for rebuilding and the monumentality of a civic center on a 231-

hectare site 580 meters from the famous bluff overlooking the Vistula River, Nowicki's team's proposal focused on monumentality to create civic pride in Warsaw's future city center. In contrast to the traumas associated with the site, the proposal largely avoided references to that past. Replacing the flattened landscape between Nowy Świat and Marszałkowska streets with bold expressways and superblocks, the new district broke free from the narrow, multidirectional streets and crowded tenement building that preceded it. It imagined a progressive, fast-paced alternative to the Warsaw of the past, organizing itself along Aleje Jerozolimskie and renaming this section of the route "the theater of city center life."²²

Transportation infrastructure was the star of the proposal's performance. Large traffic interchanges organized flows of vehicles between the intersecting limited-access expressways. As the entry text explained, there would be "as many [pedestrian] crossings as possible" and "as few [motorized traffic] junctions as possible,"²³ a strategy that divided pedestrians from cars. The four expressway junctions that framed the map were sites where groves of skyscrapers would emerge. Perhaps foreshadowing Nowicki's later proposal for a traffic circle to elevate pedestrians above New York's Columbus Circle, "the road surface" of the expressway interchange "would be slightly lifted, [...] creating a free passage underneath." The clustered skyscrapers, rising above the low-rise buildings that the team imagined for the rest of the district, framed the city's "collective skyline." The new Warsaw was secular and orderly, a departure from the forest of church spires that had previously defined the skyline.

While the proposal emphasized function and efficiency, it was also monumental. Nowicki would write about the need to balance the "immovable" with the "ever-

changing” aspects of architecture, including history.²⁴ New civic buildings—a Parliament building, National Museum, and City Center Plaza—would connect to the historic Royal Route that had connected Warsaw’s Old Town to Wilanów Palace in the south. Aleje Jerozolimskie, after crossing the Vistula River on a rebuilt Poniatowski Bridge, ascended the Warsaw escarpment through a monumental tunnel below the National Museum. These civic landmarks, while all new or rebuilt, were directly tied to historical spaces.

While the team’s overall proposal imagined an orderly alternative to the chaos of the city’s former landscape, it was also haunted by the city’s past. The proposed business district nearly covered what had been the so-called “small ghetto” immediately to the south of Chłodna Street. Because it would have been impossible for Nowicki or his team members to be unaware of the fates of the district and its inhabitants, the question of Jewish memory looms ambiguously over the entire project. It questions the political underpinnings of the entire Warsaw reconstruction process, which largely avoided references to the city’s Jewish heritage. One explanation for the ghetto’s conspicuous absence in the proposal and in Nowicki’s *Warszawska Skarpa* writings could be that the land in Warsaw was now publicly owned. With the Bierut Decree of the State National Council in October 1945, all land in the Warsaw region was nationalized; distinctions between previous parcels of real estate were voided as private property was abolished.²⁵ This new uniformity, sacrificing history for egalitarianism, provided architects like Nowicki with a blank slate on which new spatial boundaries and meanings could be drawn.

Even if Nowicki’s vision for Warsaw was secular, unrestrained by tradition, and openly futuristic, its lack of reference to Jewish heritage contradicted the historicist

gestures it did make. Major routes like Aleje Jerozolimskie and Marszałkowska were to be preserved; the Old Town was to be reconstructed meticulously; the general organization of the city would continue as it had before the war. Many civic landmarks and institutions were to be repaired or rebuilt, allowing the proposed business district to simply revive certain historical aspects that the team considered desirable. Some positive aspects of traditional urbanism were to be preserved: “in order to attain the full diversity of an urban landscape one should not refrain from the possibility of designing buildings standing close to each other as on any traditional street.”²⁶ As in Czesław Miłosz’s poem “Campo dei Fiori,” in which Roman street vendors immediately carried on with trade after the burning of philosopher Giordano Bruno in a public square, Nowicki’s proposal was haunted by questions of when and how to rebuild upon a site where Warsaw’s Jewish population had lived.²⁷

In the first of his *Warszawska Skarpa* essays, “In Search of a New Functionalism,” Nowicki critiqued the notion that functionalism would solve Poland’s postwar social problems.²⁸ After a war that destroyed nearly every palace, public square, and monument that was considered to embody Poland’s national identity, architects needed to consider broader questions than how many houses and factories would be built, how transportation would work, or where recreational spaces were to be located. The second essay, “On the Art of Moderation,” good architecture was specific to its site, collaboratively conceived and produced, and formally refined by culture, economy, and climate. To remain relevant, architecture had to be bold, yet tempered by an enduring respect for unforeseen events and surprises that would certainly come with time.²⁹ For Nowicki, architects were uniquely positioned to be voices of the society and advocates

for art and technology. The last of his Warsaw essays, “The Socialization of Architecture,” identified architecture’s social, cultural, and political stakes in the building of a new Poland. Perhaps to the dismay of many ideologues of the country’s new political establishment, Nowicki held that architecture, as an art, was more than a political instrument.³⁰ The *Warszawska Skarpa* essays provide a framework around his later essays, speeches, and buildings proposed or constructed in the United States and India. They resonate specifically in the *Magazine of Art* essays “Composition in Modern Architecture” of March 1949 and “Origins and Trends in Modern Architecture” posthumously published in 1951. The essays foreshadowed what became Nowicki’s major contributions to American architecture and academia.

Taking Warsaw Abroad

Near the end of 1945, Nowicki and his family left Poland for the United States. Being appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for an advisory position at the Polish consulate in Chicago, Nowicki returned to the city of his child and the former workplace of his father Zygmunt.³¹ His role at the consulate was to raise awareness about and funds for the Warsaw reconstruction effort, as well as to build relationships between Polish and American architecture. Soon after he arrived, he joined the “Workshop of Peace,” a team led by Le Corbusier, Sven Markelius, Oscar Niemeyer, and many others that planned a future United Nations Building in Manhattan. Nowicki was a “special consultant” to this project, joining in January 1947 but becoming actively involved later that year. He and Stanisława moved again, this time from Chicago to New York, and the decision would be pivotal in their professional network.

Each opportunity that Nowicki pursued, until the fall of 1947, happened with the blessing of the Polish government. When he gave lectures at universities and organizations in New York, Philadelphia, and other cities about Warsaw's reconstruction effort, he was acting as an architect and a diplomat. In spring 1946, Nowicki helped facilitate *Warsaw Lives Again*, the traveling version of *Warsaw Accuses*. It opened in April 1946 at the Library of Congress in Washington, to later travel to institutions in New York, Boston, Chicago, and other cities. With other Poles including Stanisław Albrecht and Helena and Szymon Syrkus leading the charge, Nowicki played only a minor role in the exhibition's fundraising and awareness-raising efforts.³²

The architects and public figures that Nowicki encountered during his time on the United Nations Building project and by being involved in *Warsaw Lives Again* presented new connections and professional opportunities. He met Lewis Mumford, who had written the introduction to the *Warsaw Lives Again* catalogue, becoming friends in August 1947 and even being invited to Mumford's Upstate New York home.³³ He became acquainted with New York City's philanthropic and political elite. A photograph from a Museum of Modern Art exhibition in October 1947 shows Nowicki shaking hands with the museum's then-president, Nelson Rockefeller, whose family donated land for the United Nations Building.

In 1948 Nowicki transitioned from a temporary Polish diplomat to an American immigrant. There is little indication of the precise reason Nowicki and Stanisława decided not to return, but with the sham 1947 legislative elections in Poland and the intensification of Stalinism it comes as no surprise. Although the decision to remain in the United States instead of returning to Poland cost Nowicki his connections to the past,

the uncertainty allowed him to reclaim his architectural practice in new ways. In the spring, he began teaching architecture studios at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, where he continued the debate on “a new functionalism” that he had begun in *Warszawska Skarpa*. With his students at Pratt Nowicki explored “contemporary ideas [for the] functional city,” imagining alternatives to functional planning that would integrate the scientific methods of functionalism with formal analysis of the city as a spatial object. Warsaw, along with American cities such as Pittsburgh and New York, were case studies.³⁴ At Pratt he formed a friendly rivalry with architect and fellow instructor Philip Johnson, who would eventually invite him to see the Glass House in Connecticut in 1949 and curate a memorial exhibition at MoMA in the fall of 1950 after Nowicki’s sudden death.³⁵

In February 1948, Henry Kamphoefner, the new dean of the School of Architecture at North Carolina State College (NCSC), offered Nowicki a job. His wife Stanisława, a respected architect and educator in her own right who would go on to teach at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Southern California, was offered a position as well. The Nowickis and Kamphoefner were all contacts of Lewis Mumford, who at the time was also considering a position at NCSC. Nowicki and Stanisława accepted, moving their family to North Carolina in August. In addition to becoming Department Head for architecture, Nowicki had the opportunity to develop the school’s new curriculum. After three years of changing cities and jobs, he returned to writing. The ideas he had begun in his *Warszawska Skarpa* writings appeared again in a new, American, educational context.

The Origins of a “New Functionalism”

The first of Nowicki's *Warszawska Skarpa* essays, “In Search of a New Functionalism,” rethought the notion of stability in architecture. It is no surprise, perhaps, that in the midst of so much destruction and uncertainty, stability would be on his mind. For Nowicki, stability was more than permanence or functionality. Buildings could be destroyed; entire cities could be leveled and plunged into disorder. Stability, for Nowicki, was temporal flexibility: an ability to respond to change. As he wrote a few weeks later, designing architecture was negotiating the fixity of objects with the swirling change of their context: “the permanence of spatial forms in our art burdens us with its stability.”³⁶ Nowicki proposed an idea of function stabilized by two factors: “the changing and the unchanging, one connected with life, the other with abstraction, one based on dynamics differing in each epoch, the other based on statics with a constant form through all time.”³⁷ Whereas as the functionalism of “science” had to be constantly modified or replaced to keep up with social evolution of its users and environment, the new functionalism negotiated change by casting a wide net and expecting the unexpected:

believing in the immortality of a building we must keep in mind that its current use will often be just a short episode in its entire life span. It will take on another episode function, one we cannot foresee. [...] we are constantly observing how everything that has been determined in advance is changing in a way that is a surprise to all of us, especially to the authors of previous assumptions. Can we work at the speed of pre-war times and continue thinking the ideas that came to a halt? And is this a modern way of thinking? It seems doubtful.³⁸

For Nowicki, the functionalism of Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse* or the CIAM's *Athens Charter* could only contend with given conditions; it did not respond to or influence “the human mind's true nature.” His new functionalism would “not result from research on inhabitants' changing lives, but rather from the modernity of the human being who creates and is therefore an indispensable subsidiary element.” Architecture was an art, not

a science; it did more than “increase the standard of living.”³⁹ Then Nowicki critiqued the notion that functionalism was objectivity. “A basic and almost exclusive law of architectural composition emerged from taking into consideration the vital function of the transient inhabitants.” Quoting from Frank Lloyd Wright that “‘form follows function’ is but a statement of fact,” Nowicki explained that to pretend that the notion of the “functional” was not conditioned by composition was to ignore architecture’s humanistic potentials. Balancing “changing” with “unchanging” reconciled history with form.

Nowicki’s essay “Origins and Trends in Modern Architecture,” published posthumously in 1951, applied the ideas of the new functionalism in a critique of modern architectural form.⁴⁰ He first dispensed with the notion that modernism and the avant-garde had invented functionalism: “architecture [has] always had to satisfy a function.”⁴¹ Explaining the obsession with functional honesty and “exactitude” had devolved into a “decoration of function,” Nowicki argued that modern architecture’s search for functional purpose was circular. Proposing a solution in the expression of structure as an alternative, Nowicki held “that there is no single way of solving” a functional problem. The architect’s self-consciousness would liberate form from the paradox of functional “precision”; architecture would stabilize as it “matured” in time:

The period of functional exactitude expressed its mysterious longings for ornament through the decoration of *function*; our period of functional flexibility expresses them in the decoration of *structure*. Art tends not only to discover the truth, but to exaggerate and finally to distort it. *It may be that in this distortion lies the essence of art.*⁴²

In late 1948 and early 1949, Nowicki wrote and Stanisława designed a new curriculum booklet for the School of Design at NCSC, where Nowicki evolved the precepts of his functionalism essay to tenets of architectural pedagogy. The “unchanging” and “everchanging” became two of the school’s four curricular essentials, the others being

nature as “the birthplace of all structure” and time as “the yardstick of human memory and the module of space.”⁴³ Nowicki emphasized a holistic approach to architectural education, one that diverged from his own training at Warsaw Polytechnic. Each student was “a citizen first and a professional later,” a disciplinary polyglot in art and research rather than an expert reliant on a specific capability.⁴⁴ Education was not a transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next; it was instead, a process of individual discovery and collective contribution. Integrating architecture studios with courses in landscape, textile, and industrial design, architecture at NCSC would be collaborative and interdisciplinary, avoiding “the rigid academicism that results when order degenerates to formula.”⁴⁵ Lewis Mumford, in the booklet’s introduction, put it another way:

The present situation in architecture parallels that in medicine. In both professions, we begin to see, the restoration of the general practitioner, capable of dealing with every part of his field and concerned with the welfare of the human being as a whole, has become a condition for the sound use of specialized knowledge and skill. We cannot and should not return to the traditional limitations of the past: we must rather conceive of a program of education which will make our technology a supple instrument of human development.⁴⁶

The curriculum had four major subject groups: “design,” “structures and technical subjects,” “descriptive drawing,” and “humanities, history, and regional studies.”

Previously in Warsaw, Nowicki had written that “belief in the immortality of one’s own art is crucial for the work of an architect. It is the basis for a deep sense of professional responsibility, just as devising ways of making buildings durable is the basis of the development of the construction craft.”⁴⁷ The “immortality” of architecture was connected to stability: “even if time or a disaster turns the city into ruins, as long as there are people, its architecture will, in the form of reproductions, pictures or drawings, always have a role to play, sometimes no less important than that for which it was originally created.”⁴⁸ In the NCSC booklet, the agency of each individual student was stability.

Encountering various subjects as they took classes, students gathered new experiences and knowledge as they adapted previous ones. Instruction in history and regional studies paralleled analysis of existing forms and environmental conditions with analysis of existing knowledge:

an emphasis is placed on the intellectual message that can be deciphered in an existing architectural form influenced by its surroundings. A continuity of thought in a constantly changing form of architecture and organized landscape is stressed here. From this stage of his studies the student proceeds to the history of Architectural form treated as a document of social relationships characteristic for each and every period. An advanced course in sociology follows.⁴⁹

Thinking in terms of time rather than object would result in architects better equipped to adapt themselves and their work to changing conditions. By situating studios among courses in history and the social sciences, a smarter architect and better architecture was possible.

Nowicki wrote “On the Art of Moderation” in November 1945, transitioning from architectural form to “the temperament of the artist.”⁵⁰ Subtitled “thoughts of an architect at his drawing board” and focused on the process of making architecture rather than the resulting objects themselves, the essay held that the “stability” of the new functionalism was found in “moderation.” “Every road can lead to beauty,” he said, “and these roads are countless in terms of the essence of art – ‘ars una species mille.’ The choice is dependent on the temperament of the artist – everyone sees the world differently, and ‘art is nature seen through temperament.’”⁵¹ Just as there were many potential paths to “beauty,” there were many factors that influenced architecture. Climate, the complex collaborations of the design and construction process, and the architect’s own desires and tendencies played a role in the making of the form. Poland’s harsh climate and its tradition of “moderation and small scale” building were part of its reconstruction criteria.

Previous devastation and a dearth of resources were inherent “characteristics of Polish architecture,” undeniable features of the country’s new architectural identity.”⁵²

Moderation was a necessity but also a strategy—a material condition but also a loosening of the architect’s grip.

In his team’s proposal for the Warsaw business district, a polynuclear arrangement of functional zones moderated the “collective skyline” envisioned for the city. Most buildings were of a low, uniform profile, while the groves of skyscrapers at the highway interchanges added visual dynamism to the skyline. Debris from destroyed buildings would be the basic structural and fill material, but the proposal did “not [...] prescribe the building material to be used” on exteriors.⁵³ Variation of façade material would allow the unified, consistent form of the city to accommodate unique building identities upon closer view.

This attention to scale and variation played a significant role in Nowicki’s later “Composition in Modern Architecture” essay in 1949.⁵⁴ Where the functionalism essay explored the relationship between history and form and the moderation essay positioned variation as a necessary aspect of form, the composition essay tied “order, unity, [and] diversity” together.

“Less is more.” This statement of Mies van der Rohe expresses one of the principles adopted by our period. Order and elimination seem to be the roots of the simplicity sought for by composition in contemporary architecture. but the latter, in contrast to the architecture of earlier periods, attempts to create an order of freedom instead of one of rigid subordination to a single dominating element.⁵⁵

For Nowicki, order and diversity were not oppositional when architecture’s inhabitants knew “what to expect from the whole by what one has experienced in the parts already seen.” There was a difference between “ordered freedom” and “exactitude as truth,” with the former allowing for variation within a conceptual whole and the latter becoming

outmoded by its own claim to primacy. The ideal-shattering experiences of Nowicki's past and the uncertainty of his present moment seemed to frame a distrust for static architectural form and a search for architecture that would reconcile functional needs, individual temperament, and an unforeseeable future.

Flexibility and variation were themes of Nowicki's designs that he took from Warsaw to the United States and India. Starting in 1948, Nowicki worked on concept design and planning for the North Carolina State Fairgrounds. Integrating the diverse programs and functions of exhibition halls, horse racetracks, gaming arcades, elevated walkways, and livestock stables into the massive campus on the western outskirts of Raleigh, the necessity to accommodate a variety of compositions was for Nowicki an opportunity to show variation existing within the whole. Extensive sketches and diagrams of the project, produced while he was teaching at NCSC, demonstrated how moderation and variation drove the composition of Nowicki's bold master plan. Each building had its own language of structural expression, with many different curvilinear forms juxtaposing or overlaying each other.

In 1949, Nowicki, his wife Stanisława, and William Dietrick collaborated on the interiors of a clubhouse for Raleigh's Carolina Country Club. The calligraphic strokes of their floral "Meadow" tapestry tempered the sleekness of the glass-and-steel interior. Nowicki had once written that "architectural composition should include a part of the neighboring landscape whose natural scale is the point of departure for the work of the architect."⁵⁶ The forest visible beyond the panoramic, full-height glazed windows of the clubhouse was also an abstract image on furniture, wall tapestries, and room dividers, softening the sharp geometries of the space and bringing "the outdoors into the dining

room, ballroom and lounge.”⁵⁷

While Warsaw’s endless expanse of debris meant that its landscape was an inescapable part of Nowicki’s task for designing the new business district, in his later North Carolina State Fairgrounds master plan the rolling hills, forests, and farms the of Atlantic Piedmont were a new context for his work to integrate. Archived sketches from the project show terraced wetlands and woodlands mediating circulation paths throughout the site, echoing the tree-lined highways and pedestrian walkways of the Warsaw business district. In the fairgrounds’ elliptical horse track, Nowicki reconciled the difference speeds of walking and racing by placing a park in the center of the track oval. The flowing contours of walkways and terraces emulated nature; quiet gardens, follies, and artificial water features contrasted the energy of the racetrack. Nature become a medium through which humans experienced architecture.

At the new Indian city of Chandigarh, which Nowicki began planning with New York urban planner Albert Mayer in early 1950, nature again was a compositional metaphor. The central artery of Warsaw’s business district, called “theater of city center life,” resonated in the bold central stem of Chandigarh’s “Leaf” parti. The Indian city’s avenue-bounded civic axis organized its residential zones. Vein-like cul-de-sacs converged on public recreation and assembly spaces, merging the image of nature with the ideal of democracy.

Expressive Form and Society

While the notion of moderation allowed Nowicki the freedom to interrogate compositional possibilities for form beyond functional justification, the boldness of

structural expression in many of his projects can hardly be described as “moderate.” His turn from function to structure, relying on static physics to offer more “natural” aesthetics than any human-defined notion of function, manifested in built and proposed buildings. Nowicki’s sketches for a new Polish parliament building on the banks of the Vistula River are noteworthy not only for the building’s size, prominence, or its political implications, but for the way it resonated in later projects in the United States and India. It was a circular plan, with double-shelled exterior walls forming a horseshoe-shaped circulation zone around the meeting hall. A grand southeasterly view peered over terraced gardens toward a bend in the Vistula River. The building’s 120-meter diameter left a large and column-free floor space for Sejm sessions, the expansive roof supported at the building’s perimeter. Nowicki’s solution to this unique structural challenge was a system of tensile cables, arranged in spokes, that offset the structural forces across the hall. Each cable began at the height of the supporting walls, continued through a common center, and finished at the opposite edge of an elevated ring element situated at twice the height of the building’s exterior walls. Through this impressive roof form, Nowicki imagined a Polish parliament in a starkly modern meeting facility. Through bold structural expression and the prominence of the site, his parliament building synthesized architecture with democracy. Nowicki’s integration of formal expression and technical precision, introduced in the building, appeared throughout later projects. Although he was technically trained, his architecture always had political ambitions. Expressive structure, for Nowicki, had an endless range of political and social possibilities. From the parliament building to pavilions and meeting halls abroad, Nowicki engaged structural engineering as an integral aspect of architecture.⁵⁸

Spirals, vortexes, and other circular forms like the parliament building appeared throughout Nowicki's drawings, often marking social functions or relaying between convergent groups of pedestrians. During his New York period, Nowicki was part of a team that proposed an elevated, disc-shaped pedestrian bridge over New York's Columbus Circle. Here, the raised circle articulated speed, visually defining the difference in velocity of pedestrian and vehicular movement. He separated them as he had in the Warsaw business district plan. His spiraling, open-air exhibition hall proposed for the entrance of the North Carolina State Fairgrounds a couple years later was a social collector, sited at the intersection of two major circulation routes on the fairgrounds site. A spiral ramp was a feature element of his proposal for a North Carolina Museum of Art, History, and Science, distinct from the rest of the building's strict structural grid. In some sketches, the ramp wrapped a cylindrical lightwell; in others it spiraled around a reflecting pool, gently negotiating grade change between floors like the sloped exhibition space of Frank Lloyd Wright's 1959 Guggenheim Museum.

Nowicki's dream of the Polish parliament building's ambitious and expressive form was largely realized in his livestock pavilion for the North Carolina State Fairgrounds, which was actually built. Completed in 1952 two years after his premature death, his friend and Raleigh-based colleague William Dietrick finished the project. The livestock pavilion was conceived as a saddle roof structure, with double acting, intersecting parabolic concrete arches resisting each other in compression. Like what was envisioned for the Polish parliament building, tensile steel cables draped between them. The shape in plan was an ellipse, accommodating the arena's multipurpose interior and allowing for major service entrances below the arches' intersections at the north and

south ends. Because of the structural action of the arches, the outer walls of the building supported almost no weight, enabling an extensive use of exterior glazing to maximize visibility to the outside.⁵⁹ Also like the Polish Parliament building, which distributed roof loads along its perimeter, the livestock pavilion embodied the democratic ideal of unobstructed interior space; no columns would clutter the vision of spectators, all of whom had complete visual access to the central floor. The glazed exterior, acting as a prominent clerestory element above the raised seating platforms, narrowed in crescendo near the ends of the building. The impression was that the roof was floating.⁶⁰

Nowicki later sketched a Punjab Assembly Hall for Chandigarh, part of his larger planning effort in collaboration with Albert Mayer. Inspired by the Sikh temple tradition of vertically ribbed domes, Nowicki morphed these into horizontal structural rings to resist the outward thrust of the building's catenary arches. Echoing the democratic appeal of unhindered interior space present in the Polish parliament building and the Raleigh livestock pavilion, the striking civic form would sit near the end of a long causeway called the "Assembly of the People." It would punctuate a major civic axis of Chandigarh, engaging pedestrians as participants of a newly democratic, post-independence India.⁶¹

The ability to invest structural form with democratic values positioned architects as powerful social and political agents, as Nowicki's third *Warszawska Skarpa* essay "The Socialization of Architecture" had explained in November 1945. The last of his writings in Poland, the article marked an ironic end to his ambitious plans for the country's architecture. Early on he identified the overuse of the word "socialization," which had "become commonplace in conversation" and risked losing "the interest of its

essential meaning.” His astute intuition of the country’s increasingly coercive political climate may have been one of the reasons he soon left. It certainly foreshadowed the strained relationship he would have with Poland after 1948.

Although the collaborative nature of the design and construction process made architecture inherently social, for Nowicki it was more than an object. It was art, politically active but not a result of politics. Its makers were artists who offered more than activism:

Architecture, for sure, is neither a public school, a workers’ colony, a community center, a millionaire’s villa, nor all of these things assembled together. In its eternal sense, architecture is, of course, one of the fine arts, a sister of painting and sculpture, and—as architects like to emphasize—the oldest of the family.

Architecture reflected society, but it was also a framework within which society developed. Whether the spatial form was a technologically ambitious parliament building rising from the ashes of a devastated Central European capital city, a vast meeting hall attempting to embody in stone the democratic aspirations of a postcolonial nation-state, or a multipurpose venue showcasing the agricultural accomplishments of North Carolina, architects were an enlightened class equipped with the intuition and expertise to understand and express society’s values: “Will architects today have courage to make bold decisions? There is a saying that the number of creative people does not change much throughout the various epochs of history. Even in the moments of general cultural decline, it is possible to see their shimmer.”

For Nowicki, architecture’s socialization meant a social contract between the profession and its wider constituency. Architects created social environments, instilling social values through space and form. But they needed support. Society was also an

environment where architects lived and work; it was a medium in which architectural form took shape:

The results stem from the social climate that surrounds them with soft warmth or with the chill of an icy wind. The duty of society is to create a ‘climate.’ The duty of the architect—to take full advantage of this climate. In the harmony between the social climate and this work lies the socialization of architecture.

Being purged from public discourse and memory in Poland after he defected to the United States in 1948, Nowicki’s socialization essay would resound in his own life in a very real way. The “icy wind” of political ostracization would largely remove him from Polish architectural history until the 1980s, when Tadeusz Barucki wrote the first of a two-part chronological biography. The thirty-year delay in defining Nowicki’s Polish afterlife resulted from the fact that his proposals never fully materialized and many were not credited to him.

But Nowicki’s influence on the city’s reconstruction should not be discounted; it was his team’s site plan for the business district that *Warsaw Lives Again* used to raise awareness and funds as it traveled in the United States and England. His students and colleagues from Warsaw Polytechnic and fellow writers from *Warszawska Skarpa*, many of whom credited Nowicki as their greatest influencer, joined the PZPR and other political circles that went on to complete Warsaw’s rebuilding. Many helped draft and assemble President Bierut’s *The Six-Year Plan for the Reconstruction of Warsaw* propaganda photobook of 1950. Although Nowicki’s “theater of city center life” along Aleje Jerozolimskie would never materialize, a similar civic space in almost the same location—to be named Stalin Square—would be completed less than a decade later, with the Palace of Culture and Science in its center. His sketches for the Grzybów district to the west of the business district influenced architect Bohdan Lachert’s design of the

Muranów district, built in the 1950s atop the former ghetto.

Just as Nowicki's Warsaw projects never materialized, and life turned out very different than he might have previously imagined, the projects he did complete would "take on another function, one we cannot foresee." The unexpected futures of his Chandigarh plans and his Raleigh livestock pavilion, each project finished by others, demonstrated this fact. The "Leaf" scheme for Chandigarh, reimagined by Le Corbusier's team when he and Pierre Jeanneret took over the project, became straighter, more grid-like and less naturalistic in plan. Instead of a catenary dome of the Assembly Hall, the project became Le Corbusier's low-slung Palace of Assembly, a diagram of uninterrupted circulation and exchange.

In one way, the building of Nowicki's livestock pavilion at the North Carolina State Fairgrounds fulfilled his dream of the Polish parliament building. Opened in 1952 on the western outskirts of Raleigh, the capital of North Carolina, Dorton Arena symbolized "what architecture and building could do and what postwar North Carolina wanted." But this afterlife of Nowicki's expressive roof form did not simply substitute one city for another, or recuperate a static formal concept in a new political system. Dorton Arena has been a dynamic part of North Carolina's cultural scene over the past seventy years, hosting everything from concerts, sporting events, presidential and candidates, to circuses, televangelists, and trade shows. More than once the North Carolina state government has renovated the building's roof, exterior curtain walls, and interior ceilings. To address the unforeseen acoustical problems of the echoey ceiling, large, imposing, rectangular sound baffles have been suspended in a grid across the entire interior. The exterior glass across the east and west facades has been replaced and

repaired repeatedly in order to address issues of glare. The building has become notoriously difficult to maintain, being admonished repeatedly for its grimy appearance and dysfunctional, uncomfortable seating arrangements. While the innovation of a column-free interior promised to democratize the building with unobstructed interior views, the “gravel parking lots and kitschy fairground buildings” do not attract outward views. However, the building always strikes a chord with visitors. Many are impressed by the strangeness of the roof-dominated building; others take offense to its outdated flamboyance, even calling it a “dinosaur.”

Although his life ended prematurely in 1950, the destiny of Nowicki’s matured projects remains an unfinished story. He was a designer whose experiences moved his practice beyond the values he inherited from his formative education and training, a designer whose self-discovery was interrupted many times and had to be developed in many far-flung places, a survivor of the transformative moments during and after the Second World War who continued to reflect upon and interrogate them for the few remaining years he had to live. Nowicki’s story is a transition from one physical and political reality to another, but it also speaks to a particular pursuit of stability in life and in form, one muddled by persistently uncertain futures and iterated through multiple career interruptions. The war perhaps shattered many of the ideals Nowicki may have had in the architecture of function that he was taught, but it also enabled a new and flexible vision for what architecture could be in the future—an aspect of his work that continues years later as his projects rediscover new function, form, and origins.

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- ¹ Newspaper and Magazine Clippings, Exhibit Material (1 of 2) 1950-1960, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 1, Matthew Nowicki Drawings and Other Material, MC 00190, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, NC.
- ² "Raleighan Victim of Crash as Egyptian Airliner Falls," Newspaper Clipping, Ibid.
- ³ Memorial Exhibition for Matthew Nowicki, Press release. The Museum of Modern Art, September 1950. <<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3272>> Accessed December 10, 2020
- ⁴ Quote from Georgia Qualls, "Dorton only monument to Nowicki's greatness," *Raleigh News and Observer* (October 15, 1989), 1E.
- ⁵ Lewis Mumford. "The Life, The Teaching and The Architecture of Matthew Nowicki" *Architectural Record*, (July 1954), 142-143.
- ⁶ Zygmunt Nowicki was a leading figure in the Polish Agrarian Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe).
- ⁷ Tyler Sprague, "Expressive Structure: The Life and Work of Matthew Nowicki," PhD dissertation (University of Washington, 2013), 84-85.
- ⁸ Maciej Nowicki, "Remarks on Architectural Education in Europe," Speech transcript for Boston Society of Architects Education Meeting (24 May 1949), 2. From The G. Holmes Perkins Collection, 054-51a, The Architecture Archives, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.
- ⁹ Sprague, PhD dissertation, 93.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 98.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Maciej Nowicki. "The National Economy Bank Building: Notes on the recent competition," *Arkady* 1 (January 1936): 11-15. Translation in Tadeusz Barucki, *Maciej Nowicki, Architekt, 1910-1950* (Mury Salzmann, 2012), 109. This building survived the war, and today serves as the headquarters building of the Polish Press Agency.
- ¹³ See Louise Llewellyn Jarecka, *Made in Poland: Living Traditions of the Land*, A.A. Knopf, 1949.
- ¹⁴ "New Country Club," *Life Magazine* (July 31, 1950), 70.
- ¹⁵ Kędziołek, et. al, *Listy Heleny Syrkus*, 75.
- ¹⁶ Mumford, "The Life, Teaching and Architecture of Matthew Nowicki," *Architectural Record* 115, Nr. 6 (1954), 141.
- ¹⁷ Sprague, "Expressive Structure," 115. Warsaw Polytechnic was temporarily renamed the "Warsaw School of Building Trades."
- ¹⁸ School for the Blind photocopies of plans and sections, Series 1, Box 2, Folder 11, Matthew Nowicki Drawings and Other Material, MC 00190, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, NC.
- ¹⁹ Nowicki, "Remarks on Architectural Education in Europe," Speech transcript, 9.
- ²⁰ In Polish: Pracownia Dyskusji Architektonicznej.
- ²¹ Nowicki, "Remarks on Architectural Education in Europe," Speech transcript, 9.
- ²² Maciej Nowicki, et. al., "City Planning Project: Downtown Warsaw," 1945, Typescript in in the Warsaw History Museum. trans. Kinga Gintowt and Anna Szostak in Barucki, *Maciej Nowicki*, 113.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Nowicki, "W poszukiwaniu nowego funkcjonalizmu," *Warszawska Skarpa*, Nr. 3 (1945), 2.
- ²⁵ See Introduction.
- ²⁶ Nowicki, et. al. "City Planning Project," in Barucki, *Maciej Nowicki*, 111.
- ²⁷ Czesław Miłosz, "Campo dei Fiori," 1943. In *The Collected Poems 1913-1987*. The Ecco Press, 1988. <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49751/campo-dei-fiori>> Accessed January 15, 2021.
- ²⁸ Nowicki, "W poszukiwaniu nowego funkcjonalizmu," 2.
- ²⁹ Maciej Nowicki, "O Sztuce Umiaru – Myśli architekta przy rysownicy," *Warszawska Skarpa*, Nr. 5 (1945), 4-5.
- ³⁰ Maciej Nowicki, "Uspołecznienie architektury," *Warszawska Skarpa*, Nr. 9 (1945), 2
- ³¹ "Maciej Nowicki," SARP Hall of Fame. <<https://sarp.warszawa.pl/architekci/hall-of-fame/maciej-nowicki/>> Accessed February 1, 2021.
- ³² Helena and Szymon Syrkus. *Helena and Szymon Syrkus to Stanisław Tolwiński*, May 4 1946. Letter. Translation in *Archipelag CIAM: Listy Heleny Syrkus*, eds. Aleksandra Kędziołek et. al. (Warsaw: National

Institute of Architecture and Urbanism, 2019), 199.

³³ Sprague, "Expressive Structure," 236.

³⁴ Pratt Institute student project, lecture notes, functional cities, 1950, Box 8, Folder 3, Matthew Nowicki Drawings and Other Material, MC 00190, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, NC.

³⁵ Sprague, "Expressive Structure," 240.

³⁶ Maciej Nowicki, "O Sztuce Umiaru," 5.

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³⁸ Nowicki, "W poszukiwaniu," 2.

³⁹ Nowicki, "W poszukiwaniu," 2.

⁴⁰ Matthew Nowicki, "Origins and Trends in Modern Architecture," 1951. *The Magazine of Art*. Republished in Joan Ockman and Ed Eigen. *Architecture Culture, 1943-1968* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1993), 150-156.

⁴¹ Ibid., 151.

⁴² Ibid., 156.

⁴³ School of Design Booklet written by Matthew Nowicki and designed by Stanislava Nowicki – North Carolina State College, Undated. Series 2, Box 1, Folder 11, Matthew Nowicki Drawings and Other Material, MC 00190 (Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, NC), 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Lewis Mumford, "Introduction," in Ibid., 2-3.

⁴⁷ Nowicki, "W poszukiwaniu," 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Nowicki, School of Design booklet, 11.

⁵⁰ Nowicki, "O Sztuce Umiaru," 4.

⁵¹ Ibid. "Ars una species mille" is Latin for "one art has many types."

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Nowicki, et. al., "City Planning Project," in Barucki, *Maciej Nowicki*, 115.

⁵⁴ Matthew Nowicki, "Composition in Modern Architecture," *Magazine of Art* (New York: 1949), 110.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 109.

⁵⁶ Nowicki, "O Sztuce Umiaru," 5.

⁵⁷ "New Country Club," *Life Magazine*, 70.

⁵⁸ Sprague, "Expressive Structure," 4.

⁵⁹ North Carolina State Fairgrounds: Arena, seating arrangement, 1992-003-069, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 2; North Carolina State Fairgrounds: Arena, underside, 1992-003-023 & 1992-003-024, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 4. Matthew Nowicki Drawings and Other Material, MC 00190, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, NC.

⁶⁰ "J.S. Dorton Arena" at *North Carolina State Fairgrounds Facilities*.

<<https://www.ncstatefair.org/facilities/dorton.htm>> Accessed 16 March 2020.

⁶¹ Chandigarh: "Assembly of the People," 0004-006-001-0001, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 6, Matthew Nowicki Drawings and Other Material, MC 00190, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, NC.

Chapter 3

Rupture and Continuity: Helena Syrkus

At the July 1949 meeting of the CIAM in Bergamo, Italy, Polish architect and urban planner Helena Syrkus urged her colleagues to accept Socialist Realism: “We of CIAM must revise our attitude. The Bauhaus is as far behind us as Scamozzi. It is time to pass from the Athens Charter to reality.”¹ Using the term itself, Syrkus described Socialist Realism as art that “uplifts the spirit of the people” it claims to serve. As she put it,

I also make a self-critique. The demands of the Athens Charter have been completely satisfied in my country since 1945. The success of the Polish reconstruction plan is enormous in numerical terms. But more is necessary: We wish to see the transformation of man, of the human conscience, and of the architect himself.²

The Athens Charter, a foundational text of the CIAM that identified living, working, recreation, and circulation as the essential functions of a city, was for Syrkus insufficient in addressing addendum implicated culture and history as well, calling for open-mindedness about vernacular aesthetics and monumentality rather than essentializing modern architecture as a placeless, global protocol of abstract forms. Opposed by her CIAM colleagues, who largely rejected “symbolic” or “sentimental” forms like those associated with the Stalinist doctrine, Syrkus reminded her audience that “construction is but a skeleton. It has great interest for the anatomist, but for the rest it only becomes beautiful when it is covered with fine muscles and a lovely skin.”³ Lovely skin, presumably, implied façade embellishments and neoclassical buildings like Boris Iofan’s proposed Palace of Soviets, Lev Rudnev’s Moscow State University tower, or those lining Moscow’s Gorky Street. But for Syrkus, more important than how Socialist Realist

modern architecture looked was the task of changing architects' thinking, empathizing with "the people," and creating forms and space legible to the everyday resident.

As architects obsessed over functional expression and "made a fetish of the skeleton," retreating into their "ivory tower,"⁴ Socialist Realism crossed the "abyss created by the capitalists between art and reality" by expressing a "greater respect for the spirit of the past."⁵ As an example, Syrkus invoked Spanish painter Pablo Picasso, a colleague, fellow communist, and friend whose experiences during the Spanish Civil War of the late-1930s had radicalized his politics and brought his work closer to anti-war and anti-capitalist "realism": "The work of Picasso is realistic in [...] showing the rottenness of capitalist society." Picasso's experience in the Spanish Civil War, in this way, seemed to parallel Syrkus's own experience in German-occupied Poland was clear; *Guernica* seemed to resonate in post-1945 Warsaw, where Syrkus was a leading architectural and political figure of the government-run Office for the Reconstruction of the Capital (BOS). Beyond creating "eclectic forms" or "drawing our material directly from the forms of the past," Syrkus's rebuilt Warsaw would "preserve all that is good in the lines of roads, open places, the connections with the Vistula, and all remaining evidences of its ancient culture."⁶ Socialist Realism promised architecture for and of "the people": grounded in history and vernacular tradition, unrestrained by the ossified aesthetic paradigms of function.

Syrkus's words contradicted her own history with the CIAM. Her newfound appreciation of history diverged from what she had done and said for the past two decades. Since the late 1920s, Syrkus was a member of the avant-garde artists group *Praesens* and worked for the leftist Warsaw Housing Cooperative.⁷ She designed,

exhibited, and wrote about social housing, technical construction standards, and planning strategies to reshape Poland's physical and social landscapes. One of the original drafters of the Athens Charter, Syrkus had been involved with the CIAM since the 1928 League of Nations building competition. Her architecture and activism had long been synonymous; opposing the "chaos" of capitalism, for her, meant pursuing "function" and "order" in urban planning. Leftism had always meant *resistance* to the surrounding regime.

But by 1945 in the leveled landscape of Warsaw, as a physical revolution concluded and a political one was just beginning, Syrkus abandoned her posture of defiance. Collusion with the new communist regime was now the most direct route to socialism. "The 'formalism' of CIAM was positive in its early days—it was a revolt. It made use of analytical methods, which were also socialist methods [...] but its importance has gradually grown less and less."⁸ For Syrkus, the aesthetics of modernism had lost their socialist function somewhere along the way. Whereas before the war "stupid façade luxuries" and "cake classicism" had been building features to deride,⁹ in 1949 history had function: "the Greek Agora had its function; the medieval piazza at Bergamo had its function; but open places have been deliberately degraded by the capitalist system in order that people should not have the opportunity to unite against the system."¹⁰ Syrkus's Socialist Realism was not a sweeping appreciation of history; instead, it selected which histories should be resurrected and which ones should be left destroyed by the war.

But Syrkus's crisis of ideas and friendship was also an act of improvisation and continuity. Her lifelong project of transforming Polish society through architecture

persisted, albeit under new terms. For Syrkus, a Polish Jew, the German occupation had meant a daily reality of fear and hiding for over six years; it meant the near-total destruction of the world she knew and the near-total loss of so many friends and family members, who had either died or fled. But it also, in retrospect, meant Warsaw became a *tabula rasa*. For radical urban planners whose socialist visions necessitated a physical intervention in the urban landscape, such a blank slate meant endless possibilities. In October 1945 when the State National Council's Bierut Decree nationalized the land in Warsaw, what had been the utopian idea of central planning became not only a real prospect, but a state-funded institution. By criticizing herself at Bergamo, Syrkus demonstrated that rupture and continuity could coexist in symbiosis.

Syrkus's Bergamo moment demonstrates the intense scrutiny under which intellectuals and professionals in countries like Poland had to make during the Stalinist period. A few weeks before the CIAM meeting, at the Polish National Union of Architects meeting where Socialist Realism became part of official architecture culture, Syrkus performed a self-critique in which she denounced the "formalism" and "cosmopolitanism" of her work with avant-garde *Praesens* group and the international CIAM.¹¹ Her attempt, along with her husband Szymon, to salvage their relationship to the CIAM during the years of the Polish "Thaw," suggests that her speeches in June and July 1949 were transitory and insincere.¹² But Syrkus's story points to something else. In a world defined by contingency, as Michał Głowiński reflected in his account of the German occupation, tactical moves, fleeting decisions, and chance encounters became the constituent elements of one amorphous, continuous form of survival.¹³ Looking at her life from 1939 onward, Syrkus's speech at Bergamo becomes one moment in a line of

contingent events, one vector tying together a broader network of decisions. Her political commitments, professional affiliations, and personal relationships rupture and continue at different moments, and at each turn one rupture is another continuity. While Miłosz's *ketman* and "the pill of Murti-Bing"¹⁴ do offer ways to analyze Syrkus's self-criticisms and legitimize them as attempts to assuage the ever-present possibility of racial animus against Jews, conceiving of them as simply "performative" events overlooks her sustained efforts after 1945 to convince others to support Poland's communist regime.¹⁵ In this chapter, Syrkus's decisions to resist, withdraw, or collude call for an approach that is both biographical and thematic, a framework in which anecdotes, chance encounters, and patterns become indistinguishable from each other. The backstory of July 1949 and the events that follow the Bergamo speech unbracket Syrkus from a historical or essentialist narrative of "faking it for Stalinism;" these histories instead reveal her loyalties, her relationships, and her agency to be constantly in-flux, her dynamic persistence through a most harrowing set of experiences to be the continuous architectural form she always wanted but never explicitly noticed. Syrkus's story reveals how dynamic, events-based, ephemeral practices can manifest as architecture. From performing self-critiques to leading traveling exhibitions, her ability to transform architecture into performances and events parallels an ability to transform dispositional characteristics like mobility, performativity, and adaptivity into architectural form.

Background

Born Helena Eliasberg in Warsaw in May 1900, Syrkus was the first of Stella (née Bernstein) and Izaak Eliasberg's four daughters. Her father, a wealthy philanthropist

and physician at Bersohn and Bauman's Children's Hospital, led the Aid for Children (Pomóc dla dzieci) charity and was a close friend of doctor Janusz Korczak, who would later help many orphans and sick children in the Warsaw Ghetto. Syrkus grew up in well-to-do circumstances, and her parents cultivated her interests in foreign languages, writing, literary translation, philosophy, and architecture from a young age. She studied at Warsaw Polytechnic from 1918 to 1923, attending Roman Kramsztyk's drawing courses, working as a studio assistant for Polytechnic instructor and future husband Szymon Syrkus, and even taking extra philosophy seminars at the nearby University of Warsaw.¹⁶ Performing literary translation under the pseudonym Helena Niemirowska, Syrkus learned to read and speak at least four languages beyond her native Polish: German, French, English, and Russian.

She and Szymon were involved in the Polish avant-garde artists' group Blok in the late 1920s, splitting off to create their own group, called *Praesens*, in 1926. In these artistic circles that met, discussed, and published about architecture, art, and politics, the Syrkuses interacted closely with figures like Barbara and Stanisław Brukalska, Bohdan Lachert, Władysław Strzemiński, and Katarzyna Kobro.¹⁷ *Praesens* ran a publication in the late 1920s and early 1930s, a quarterly journal exploring the social role of architecture.

In 1928, the Syrkuses became members of the Swiss-founded CIAM. After Sigfried Giedion asked Szymon to set up a Polish chapter for the organization, *Praesens* soon became a national subsection. Throughout the 1930s, a major part of the couple's work with the organization, in addition to Helena's role as managing Secretary, was the speculative urban planning project *Functional Warsaw*. Emerging from the Functional

City debates at congress meetings in Berlin in 1930 and London in 1931, *Functional Warsaw* imagined a complete physical overhaul of the Polish capital to achieve an functional, orderly, and egalitarian urban form.¹⁸ With Szymon and Jan Chmielewski as project leads and Helena supporting them, the project took shape as a series of traveling exhibitions in which wall-mounted boards of aerial imagery, cartographic diagrams, and statistics depicted analyses of Warsaw's present conditions and speculated on its future. The city's regional transportation infrastructure, industrial zones, and housing supply would decompress the city center and reach further out into the suburbs and surrounding hinterlands, creating an equitable distribution of resources among social classes and emphasizing Warsaw's intermediary position between "east" and "west." The project was indebted, in this way, to the land consumption-focused Garden City movement of Ebenezer Howard from the turn of the century, to the functional zoning and reformism of fellow CIAM member Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse* project of 1930, and to the predictive planning emphasis of the ongoing Amsterdam Expansion Plan by the Syrkuses' friend Cornelis van Eesteren.

Rising anti-Semitism in 1930s Poland eventually derailed *Functional Warsaw*. Removed from his position as national vice president of SARP in 1937, Szymon also stopped presenting *Functional Warsaw* in Poland.¹⁹ The Syrkuses spent the next two years trying to secure jobs with public planning and private design commissions, but when the war began in 1939 they had to hide. Working in the underground Architecture and Urbanism Studio (PAU) that was being run surreptitiously by future Warsaw mayor Stanisław Tolwiński and other architects from the Warsaw Housing Cooperative, they continued their urban planning and research in secret. While the war dashed hopes for

Functional Warsaw, the destruction of the city by 1945 would actually enable the resurrection of many of its ideas.

Nearly eight months before the German invasion of Poland, Syrkus seemed set on emigration. In January 1939, two months after *Kristallnacht* and just three weeks before Hitler predicted “the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe” in his radio-broadcast speech to the German Reichstag, Syrkus began corresponding via letters with CIAM colleagues and friends in Western Europe and the United States about jobs and opportunities abroad. As Jews were being purged from Polish institutional leadership, persecuted in business and the streets, and separated from Polish students via “ghetto benches” at universities, Syrkus decided to follow the examples of her cousin Wladimir Eliasberg and aunt Aniela Landau in New York, leaving before it was too late.²⁰ On January 10 she wrote to Cornelis van Eesteren and his wife Frieda Fluck in Amsterdam, suggesting that she and Szymon could put their research experience and multiple language abilities to work in an American design or planning office:

How do you think, can I contact Giedion and Gropius in this matter? Giedion knows my abilities. He just does not know that in the meantime I have learned to shorthand (in all languages) and that I have polished my English. This request – or this suggestion – does not come easily to me, but it must be made [...] Please, say honestly what you think about it. But fast enough – okay? Because the situation changes so quickly, and crossing the borders becomes more and more difficult.²¹

The fluidity of the situation was obvious. Being a Polish Jew and an educated leftist put Syrkus in the crosshairs of various political antipathies, and she understood this.

Tempering her pleas for help was a resilience gained from previous experience with anti-Semitism, which she mentioned to her German friend Walter Gropius, now teaching architecture at Harvard University:

I’ve always been so proud that I’m not fierce. But when the situation forced me to send S.O.S. signal to our friends, I suddenly suffered from an inferiority complex. Then I put

on my skis, run for a few hours in the snow, and still in the swing, with my cheeks red from the frost [...] So, I sat down and wrote this long letter. [...] Please reply as soon as possible – because the events are developing extremely fast. I’m convinced that I’m a lucky woman – nothing bad can happen to me – at the most difficult moment a miracle has to happen that helps me out of trouble, just like it used to happen in the past [...] I’m walking around with a smile on my face, which isn’t at all appropriate, and I still wake up with laughter. Poor Szymon, who takes things so hard, always asks me: ‘Where do you get this everyday optimism from?’ But maybe I’m just stupid? ”²²

In a parallel letter addressed to both Gropius and Sigfried Giedion, Syrkus made it clear that she and Szymon were interested only in public-sector architecture jobs or academic positions, implying that working outside the support of the state was too unstable and risky.²³ Gropius, accordingly, inquired with American social housing writer Catherine Bauer about potential employment opportunities.²⁴ But the Syrkuses, without sufficient documentation of teaching or work experience, could not meet the paperwork requirements.

After the Germans and Soviets invaded Poland in September 1939 it became clear that the preemptive escape was impossible; a rescue approach was necessary. In February 1940 Cornelis van Eesteren and Frieda Fluck sent a letter to several CIAM members asking for financial support to evacuate the Syrkuses through Italy.²⁵ In October Giedion formally inquired with the Catholic Church’s Pontifical Committee for Aid to Prisoners of War about evacuating the Syrkuses to South America.²⁶ Helena’s cousin Wladimir Eliasberg and aunt Aniel Landau, attempted to bring the couple to Alvin Johnson’s “University in Exile” at the New School for Social Research in New York City.²⁷ After hearing from Eliasberg, Gropius also reached out to Alvin Johnson about extraction strategies.²⁸ None of these attempts worked.

The fall and winter of 1942 and 1943 were especially difficult. In October 1942 Szymon, at the time director of the clandestine PAU studio in Żoliborz, was arrested by

the Nazis and sent to Auschwitz, where his fate remained unknown for some time. In January 1943, Syrkus's sister Anna was murdered. Her mother Stella, an administrator of her deceased husband's Aid for Orphans organization and a manager of Janusz Korczak's orphanage in the ghetto, was trapped there until she miraculously escaped and fled to Canada as the Ghetto Uprising began in spring 1943.²⁹ After Szymon's deportation, Syrkus took over directorship of the PAU and remained in the city until the 1944 Uprising, when she was imprisoned by the Germans at a temporary camp in Pruszków. She was able to escape, fleeing for the town of Końskie in the south before arriving at a safe house on Floriańska Street in Kraków, which was about to be liberated by the Soviet Red Army. She joined architect Roman Piotrowski to lead the PAU's Kraków studio for the Warsaw reconstruction effort. On the night of January 6, between her arrival and that of the Soviets, Syrkus was again captured by the Germans and then sent to a holding facility outside Breslau (today Wrocław). This was just before the Red Army began its Siege of Breslau, lasting until May; the ever-resilient Syrkus, hunkered down for three more months, survived.

May 1945—May 1946

On May 7, upon Wrocław's liberation, Syrkus returned to Warsaw and took the position of Propaganda Head with the new state-funded Office for the Reconstruction of the Capital (BOS). As leader of the Propaganda Division's "Graphics Studio," she supervised the gathering of photographs for the traveling version of the national exhibition *Warsaw Accuses, Warsaw Lives Again*, which would travel in the United States and England in the spring of the next year.³⁰ Having joined the PPR in 1944,

Syrkus was already well-connected within party circles, friends with Warsaw mayor Stanisław Tolwiński and KRN secretary Bolesław Bierut, and strategically positioned as an architect for leadership in the new communist regime. Her husband Szymon, whose health had deteriorated over the past several years in Nazi custody, was still awaiting repatriation on a farm in American-occupied Bavaria.³¹ Although Helena was already busy working on the BOS's reconstruction efforts and the planning of the new *Warsaw Lives Again* exhibition, her main project in the summer of 1945 was repatriating her husband. After she returned to Warsaw, Syrkus's first message to her friend Walter Gropius, after six years of silence, was distinctly personal and concise. It combined the kind of passion born of unintentionally lapsed friendship with the desperation of Szymon's situation, an optimism for the Warsaw reconstruction effort, and the brevity of a telegram:

MANY HEARTY THOUGHTS. STILL WAITING FOR SYRKUS ARRESTED 1942 SENT TO CONCENTRATION CAMP OSIECIM. [...] HAS A TATTOOED NUMBER 77165 ON THE ARM. DO HELP FIND HIM. HAVE WORKED DURING WAR AND WORKING NOW AT WARSAW RECONSTRUCTION OFFICE BOX CHOCIMSKA 33 WARSAW. WANT ORGANIZE INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION AND OUR CONGRESS HAVE THIS AUTUMN. SHALL PROBABLE BE PARIS JULY 14 WITH WARSAWS MAYOR TOLWINSKI. WOULD BE HAPPY MEETING YOU AT CORBUSSIERS TO TALK ABOUT COMPETITION CONGRESS WARSAW. ANXIOUS FOR NEWS. YOURS.³²

Syrkus's telegram negotiated three pressing interests: Szymon's rescue, her own political and architectural career, and her friendship with Gropius. It was evidently a huge relief to Gropius to hear from Syrkus, as his warm reply to Helena demonstrated.³³ He immediately reached out to the U.S. State Department, trying to make Szymon's situation known.³⁴ A few weeks later he sought non-governmental assistance, inquiring with the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society of America and offering to personally cover any cost to return Szymon to Helena.³⁵ While it is unclear whether Gropius

arranged Szymon's return to Warsaw on August 1, Helena did send a follow-up telegram to him in August confirming the fact.³⁶ Szymon joined his wife in the ranks of BOS leadership, becoming Deputy Head of Spatial Planning.

Syrkus's telegram was not just about reaching out to a dear, long-lost friend; it was also about business. Having led the Bauhaus in Weimar before Nazism forced him to flee Germany, Gropius and his wife Ise joined the faculty of the Harvard Department of Architecture in 1937. By the time of Syrkus's telegram in 1945, Gropius had become an influential public figure and a leader in the world of American architecture academia.³⁷ While the tone and content of Syrkus's June 1945 telegram seemed to eclipse the genuine depth of her friendship with Gropius with her desperation to save her husband, and Syrkus' optimism for the Warsaw reconstruction effort seemed to eclipse her desperation, the correspondence continued a relational milieu, traceable all the way back to January 1939, that was ambiguously personal and professional. From Syrkus's first pleading letters to Gropius, Cornelis van Eesteren, and Sigfried Giedion, there was a continuity between conversations private and publish, between words of friendship and those of business. Perhaps Gropius's name recognition in the United States promised to spotlight Szymon's predicament in American-occupied Germany. Perhaps the Harvard connection offered a chance to circulate the BOS's reconstruction and propaganda materials to American academic circles, which in spring 1946, through the *Warsaw Lives Again* exhibition, Syrkus would do. The confluence private, professional, and political topics defined Syrkus's correspondence with Gropius from the 1939 to 1950, and it is what later came to jeopardize the friendship altogether.

In late January 1946, after the KRN-backed *Warsaw Accuses* exhibition

concluded at the Polish National Museum, the BOS sent the Syrkuses to lead *Warsaw Lives Again* in the United States and England.³⁸ Displaying Warsaw to various American audiences, their team consisted of architects, diplomats, and journalists whose common job was to juxtapose the perils of fascism with the benefits of socialism. Joining the Syrkuses was architect and co-director of the BOS's Propaganda Division Stanisław Albrecht, journalist Aleksy Czerwiński, Tadeusz Głogowski, and Poland's Chicago Consulate technical advisor Maciej Nowicki. As architects and leaders in the BOS, the Syrkuses represented expertise and politics. Helena, known for her gregarious personality, led the exhibition's networking and fundraising campaigns, including arranging and giving radio interviews, presenting lectures, and hosting fundraising events. *Warsaw Lives Again* made use of the Syrkuses' connections to European émigré academics, like Gropius at Harvard and László Moholy-Nagy in Chicago. Starting with a grand opening at the Library of Congress in Washington, *Warsaw Lives Again* traveled to Harvard and Columbia universities, the New School for Social Research, the Art Institute of Chicago, the offices of the magazine Architectural Forum, the Philadelphia chapter of the AIA, and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO, precursor to AFL-CIO).³⁹

In this diplomatic role the Syrkuses also had the opportunity to visit their friends, the Gropiuses, at their home in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Szymon's health had suffered severely during his time at Auschwitz, so the three weeks the couples spent together from late February to early March were a time to relax, physically recover, and rekindle friendship. In her thank-you letter a few days after leaving, Syrkus noted the awkwardness of such formalities: "You can't thank for friendship—just as you can't thank for love."⁴⁰ Her ambiguously personal and professional friendship with the

Gropiuses would remain so for the next four years.

Warsaw Lives Again

“The destruction of Warsaw is a fact,” Szymon said to his audience at the New School for Social Research. “The contradictions between the former city and its rural neighborhood have been abolished by German bombs and mines. The task of the city-planners is to profit by this fact in order to open Warsaw for both technical and social progress.”⁴¹ At this point in the Syrkuses’ American lecture tour, with *Warsaw Lives Again* colleagues in tow, a mixture of New York architects, urban planners, and labor activists listened enthusiastically to the couple’s discussion of Warsaw’s past, present, and future and the relationship between the city’s architecture, Poland’s new political system, and the problem of free-market economics. They learned a vision of socialist Warsaw that had existed for many years, predating even the war that had destroyed the previous version of the city. What the Syrkuses’ speech that evening revealed was just how consistent, even through a war that had destroyed Poland, their view of Warsaw really was.

Accompanying *Warsaw Lives Again*, the Syrkuses’ lectures in the spring of 1946 echoed the political messages of the exhibition by providing an in-depth tone of analysis and the insight of trained architects. The subject of the exhibition was politics, all presented in architectural terms. “[The] problem of Warsaw’s reconstruction,” Szymon continued, “is [...] a more complex and difficult task than the construction of a new city on altogether virgin ground.”⁴² The city’s distant history, embodied in its “beautifully proportioned streets and squares,” would be salvaged and preserved. But the “economic

problem” of the city’s more recent history, when buildings “grew up chaotically during the [...] ‘free economy’ of the Nineteenth Century,” made—as he put it—parts of the city “unable to meet our present-day requirements of health and safety.”⁴³ The new Warsaw would incorporate the spatial legacies of its medieval and early modern histories, but it would dispense with what remained of its bourgeois past.

But echoing their *Functional Warsaw* of the 1930s, the Syrkuses’ new plan for Warsaw engaged “a much larger unit” than Warsaw’s traditional old town: “the CITY-REGION conceived as an ENTITY.” The planning module for the new Warsaw would be a “minimum unit corresponding to the period of motor traffic and electricity” rather than to pedestrian traffic and traditional nodes of commercial activity. Transportation technologies that expanded the city into the countryside redefined Warsaw altogether: “one must leave the city to see how the progress in highway building keeps pace with the new design of vehicles.” At the scale of residents, the new Warsaw would again be organized around economic efficiency. Like *Functional Warsaw*, the space constraints of post-1945 Warsaw necessitated that many housing amenities be shared: washing and bathing rooms, laundry facilities, children’s play areas, and green space, among other functions. “What is lacking in the individual quarters in standards of comfort and space we transfer to common social institutions,” as Szymon explained. The necessitation of shared facilities also, however, produced a politics of participatory politics that promised to make the Syrkuses’ top-down plan for Warsaw into a system of self-governance.⁴⁴

What had been called “functional self-government” in *Functional Warsaw*, a system in which the smallest units of the overall housing scheme—single-family apartments—shared common service facilities, here in the context of the KRN’s Bierut

Decree and the BOS's role as planning authority extended to the governing political structure:

[Tolwinski's] scheme meets as far as possible the requirements of the individual in society's smallest unit – the family – and stimulates, at the same time, public activity by careful cultivation of the social soil. The common interests of a group of families which reside in the same house are guided by the house committee – the smallest self-government unit.⁴⁵

This shared model of living, with its political manifestation as a representative committee, promised to reconcile the functional interests of minimizing wasted space and resources with a socialist imperative to house and represent all members of society equally. While *Functional Warsaw*, where the idea originated, rendered an alternative model of planning and politics than the city surrounding it, *Warsaw Lives Again* depicted the Syrkuses' idea taking shape literally. Szymon punctuated his point by quoting Bolesław Bierut, who was chair of the KRN, president of the Warsaw Reconstruction Council, and future president of Poland: “this plan must be the plan of democratic Poland, where each citizen is an active one. Not everyone can be Warsaw's inhabitant, but each citizen of Poland must feel that he is the ‘co-citizen’ of his own capital.”⁴⁶

Although the war and the German occupation had produced an unimaginable loss of life, lingering traumatic memories, and—for Szymon—bodily damage that would last into the future, it made the political and spatial transformation of Warsaw into an actionable possibility. “During the period of unplanned, competitive economy and land speculation before the war,” he reiterated, “this functional regional plan of Warsaw, was, of course, a Utopian one.”⁴⁷ Buildings, once scattered along the perimeter of city blocks, had stood in the way of functional planning's progress, health, and order. “Open spaces,” envisioned by the Syrkuses as venues for mass demonstration, had previously been concealed in small, randomly shaped urban courtyards. But the war had swept away all

these obstacles away. “And not by mere chance the same architects, who with these social organizers fought for a better plan of Warsaw long before its buildings were destroyed and who continued their activities in the underground even in the concentration camps, are now able to realize their plans.”⁴⁸

Of course, the propaganda efforts of communist leaders in Poland and the Soviet Union were also part of the exhibition. As head of the BOS’s Propaganda Division and supervising curator of the photography that comprised *Warsaw Lives Again*, Syrkus understood that it was necessary to regularly update the exhibition. She expressed this in a May 1946 letter to Warsaw mayor Stanisław Tolwiński, a close friend and fellow PPR member:

we must keep it up to date; we need to regularly receive current photographs depicting the restoration of life in Warsaw and constantly updated plans to show that we are making progress. [...] We’re also attaching a copy of Mumford’s letter concerning the American-Russian contact [...] he believes that we should serve intermediaries in establishing a friendly relationship not through diplomatic means but rather through personal friendships here and there.⁴⁹

Warsaw Lives Again was the version of the Polish capital that the American and British publics saw as reality. Lewis Mumford, whose introduction to the exhibition catalogue emphasized how the narrative from Poland’s destruction to the KRN’s rebuilding program could educate Americans on the value of centralized planning, was apparently interested in using the Syrkuses’ connections to the Soviet authorities for a soft, relational form of diplomacy, just as the couple wanted to leverage American contacts to promote and fundraise for the reconstruction effort.⁵⁰

Following Mumford’s introduction, the *Warsaw Lives Again* catalogue featured over a dozen pages of images telling a visual history of the city.⁵¹ First were slides of the historic city, characterized by the old town’s beautiful palaces and monuments. Then

came the section called “Nazis arrival,” depicting violence against the city’s human inhabitants and its architecture; bodies hung on gallows and crowds lined up for mass execution, all of it amid piles of rubble and images of bombed buildings. The final spreads, under the title “Order Emerges,” montaged a diagram of the city’s functional plan, a built scalar model of the new city, and an aerial image of destruction in the background. Following the series of images was a catalogue text written by Stanisław Albrecht and the Syrkuses.⁵² Describing Warsaw’s history at length, it emphasized an enduring national rivalry between Poles and Germans—“a thousand years ago, [...] the Polish nation was drawing its first breath in bloody struggles with the German enemy”⁵³—and a parallel between Polish and American histories of colonial struggle—“Warsaw again fought for its liberty [...] the struggle of the insurrectionists against the more powerful enemy [...] roused much sympathy in both Europe and America.”⁵⁴ Amid a constantly changing world, Warsaw had long been “a center of political control and goods exchange,” a “hub of social life,” and a “link in international communication between Eastern and Western Europe.”⁵⁵ Showing propagandistic solidarity with the Soviets, the text even suggested that the Red Army had been instrumental in liberating Warsaw from the Germans: “In January 1945 the violent blow of the Red Army drove the Germans out of Warsaw and Polish troops entered the city.”⁵⁶

The characterization of Warsaw as a mediator between “east” and “west” traced to *Functional Warsaw* of the 1930s and to *Warsaw Accuses* of 1945. “At the crossing of the great Eurasian Axis and the line connecting the Baltic with the Black Sea,” Warsaw was an economic and ideological gateway, today relaying between the socialism of the Soviet Union and the countries of Western Europe and North America.⁵⁷ As *Warsaw*

Lives Again traveled across the United States, it enabled the city to perform this broadcasting role. Warsaw's mediating function would later return in Syrkus's July 1949 speech to the CIAM, when she characterized the art of the "countries of the east" in relation to the "west."⁵⁸ As explored in Chapter One, the geopolitical identity of post-1945 Warsaw a larger artistic question, one that recurred in propaganda and film posters, Socialist Realist works of art, and exhibitions in the next decade.

For Albrecht and the Syrkuses, the reconstruction effort was a process that began before the war: "The new plans for Warsaw are based on studies which were carried out before the war, underground during the German occupation, and are continuing now."⁵⁹ *Warsaw Lives Again* was therefore a proposal and a progress update, a vision of future Warsaw and a reflection of progress already made. New communication infrastructure, the expansion of the east-west route through the construction of the Poniatowska Bridge, and other construction projects were part of a relay between past and future that went through the physical form of Warsaw, the intervening event of the war, and the ingenuity and foresight of architects like the Syrkuses.⁶⁰

Employing the same functional zoning and transportation strategy as *Functional Warsaw* years before, the new Warsaw would be organized around the Vistula River and its prominent escarpment. With an organization "based on old cultural tradition," having "the character of a metropolis, and [...] suited to a center of the cultural, political, and economic life of the nation," the city would be built on the western bank as the old city. Parliamentary, cultural, and administrative buildings would occupy the zone along the escarpment, the central business zone would rise to the west of Marszałkowska Street, and an intervening greenbelt would delineate a large industrial zone still further to the

west. Speed in transportation would emulate democratic ideals of agency and freedom: “travel from the most remote point to the center of the city [...] should not exceed thirty minutes, using the most modern means of communication.”⁶¹ Residential areas were mostly outside the administrative core, concentrated to the city’s north and south and then encircling the other zones as a ring. The east bank, dominated by the Praga district, would be mostly industrial, with a new canal connecting the Vistula to rivers in the east.⁶² Part of an economic imperative to return the economy to prewar levels and facilitate future growth, the new Warsaw would boost the number of houses and factories: “Warsaw is but one part of the general plan for reconstruction of the whole country.”⁶³

Many of the most enthusiastic attendees of the Syrkuses’ lecture and visitors to *Warsaw Lives Again* were young people, as Helena noted in her letter to Tolwiński. One such figure was Walter Gropius’s Harvard student Harry Cobb, whose assistance would later enable the Syrkuses to collaborate with their fellow *Warsaw Lives Again* planner Maciej Nowicki on an article in the Harvard student journal *TASK*. Published two years later in 1948, the article reiterated, in the context of a student-run publication, the message of *Warsaw Lives Again*.⁶⁴ In 1949, the Syrkuses would even invite Cobb to visit them in Warsaw and their country home in Serock, where he documented the ruins of the city in color photographs.

But *Warsaw Lives Again* was more than a propaganda or teaching exercise; it was also a learning opportunity. The couple noted during a New York City radio interview, a few days after their New School lecture, that traveling in the United States was a way of “catching up” on architecture and urban planning discourses that had evolved during the intervening war years. They looked forward to seeing the dams and other engineering

projects of the Tennessee Valley Authority near Knoxville, Clarence Stein's garden city and superblock strategy in Radburn, New Jersey, and the New Deal town of Greenbelt, Maryland. Although American, these were exemplary models of urban planning that the Syrkuses hoped to emulate in Warsaw.⁶⁵

As Syrkus explained three years later at Bergamo, the new Warsaw would “conserve its link with the past.”⁶⁶ But preserving the city's remaining historical monuments and spaces was also an act of reinventing and reclaiming her own architectural practice. The afterlife of *Functional Warsaw* in *Warsaw Lives Again* had demonstrated that Syrkus's longstanding political aspirations were adaptable from resistance to collusion, and that the new communist regime was a framework for her to thrive. *Functional Warsaw*, continuing as *Warsaw Lives Again*, no longer imagined a “utopia;” as Szymon had explained, the “planned economy and [...] the communization of the city land” meant that a workers' Warsaw was actually happening.⁶⁷

In a May 1931 article in the architecture magazine *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie* (DOM), the Syrkuses and their colleagues in Praesens wrote about the upcoming construction of a housing estate in Rakowiec, a workers' settlement in the western suburbs of Warsaw. A major emphasis of the article was the collaborative nature of *Praesens'* design process that spanned the disciplines of architecture and engineering. Architecture was not art; it was science. The scientific precision of engineering gave the *Praesens* architects a means to engineer society. With their design objective as the “essential biological needs and cultural activities of the masses,” the team's task was to “organize” and “perfect forms of social life.”⁶⁸ Although their direct client was the Warsaw Housing Collaborative, which owned and operated workers' housing estates

throughout the city, the project was ultimately funded through the industrialists who employed the workers and commissioned the WSM. The Syrkuses and their colleagues were still hopeful, since Rakowiec as a housing prototype might, in the future, be replicated. It was a first step to transform chaotic, capitalist Warsaw into an orderly, egalitarian one; it “disposed of theoretical knowledge,” addressing the real needs of the proletariat.⁶⁹

The team’s plan was to achieve financial feasibility through efficient use of material resources, communal amenities, and a focus on long-term affordability rather than the minimization of development costs.⁷⁰ Standardization offered such a pathway, each working family being allotted their own small, heated unit with a toilet and groupings of families sharing the more costly amenities like washrooms and laundromats. Everything from efficient spatial configuration of each unit’s kitchen to standardized construction processes and energy conservation strategies were ways the team rationalized Rakowiec. A lightweight, steel building skeleton freed the building plan of interior partitions, allowing for the most efficient and sanitary configurations of living spaces possible. “The estate at Rakowiec is to be a precursor to the new Polish construction system of small flats, most all due to its constructability.”⁷¹ Deployable *en masse* and inexpensive, their prototype could be repeated in various locations around the city.

Each aspect of housing units was ascribed what was, at the time, a socially progressive function. A continuous ribbon window with sliding panes would extend fully around each Rakowiec building, providing abundant and consistent lighting while minimizing the wasted space of swinging panes. Beyond the economics of the

apartments, clean and airy living conditions would equip residents with shared access to “culture.”⁷² A sliding window feature would mediate between the kitchen and living room, enabling women to multitask by watching their children while working and avoid obstructing kitchen space when they reached for the lever. A plumbing wall between the toilet and kitchen helped to consolidate piping.⁷³

The problem with Rakowiec was scalar: the limited impact of an isolated workers’ estate on the social fabric of Warsaw at-large. The project, as the Syrkuses would later admit, was an oasis “toilsomely acquired from fiendish capitalists for small groups of workers.” Although its repeatability was an attempt to initiate a broader social housing program, by itself Rakowiec was not capable of “dealing with the housing question on a national scale.”⁷⁴ Like the *siedlung* projects of New Frankfurt of the same time period, through which Ludwig Landmann and Ernst May attempted to transform the city by scattering housing estates across a wide metropolitan region, Rakowiec was just one utopia in a sea of uncontrolled development. It was a “phrase” like May’s project in the Nidda Valley, whose “promotional” character, as Manfredo Tafuri put it, did little more than demonstrate “the liberating capacities of standardized production.”⁷⁵

Writing in a 1949 article in the British journal *Architects’ Yearbook*, the same year as Syrkus’s iconoclastic speech at Bergamo, she and Szymon overcame Rakowiec’s scalar problem with their new housing estate at Koło.⁷⁶ The new Koło Housing Estate, which was actually the reconstruction of one destroyed by the war, was a story of rebirth. The article, published in English, demonstrated to the non-Polish world how Warsaw’s widespread destruction was being instrumentalized for the production of housing. It emphasized that the WSM, the social housing movement that had long been the

Syrkuses' client, had transformed from an independent organization to the institutional framework for the KRN and BOS's urban planning efforts: "the Warsaw Housing Cooperative as a basic organization of consumers, acting according to the national economic plan, changed its character from a small society to one of mass organization."⁷⁷ Demonstrating that Helena's recent speech at Bergamo updated rather than dispensed with functionalism, the Koło project promised to "secure the development of service functions, social functions, care of children, youth education, physical and mental training, etc., on the scale of home, of residential group, of neighborhood unit, of district and of town."⁷⁸

Whereas *Functional Warsaw* and Rakowiec had critiqued the disordered and misshapen outdoor spaces of bourgeois Warsaw, which were "gloomy courtyards concealed behind the street corridors," Koło boasted large outdoor spaces where residents assembled for political demonstrations.⁷⁹ This "democratization of space" occurred in vast new "urban interiors," where the proletariat annexed the public realm; here, as Syrkus said at Bergamo, workers could "unite against the system."⁸⁰ Critique was no longer necessary; revolution was actually happening.

While salvaging Warsaw's distant past was a central aspect of Syrkus's Bergamo speech, at Koło the process also meant the literal reuse of Warsaw's ruins. The couple dedicated two whole spreads of images and text to explaining a system to break down, mix, amalgamate, and recast the debris of the destroyed city. Various ruin aggregates, combined with cement, would be vibrated and left to set in forms in order to produce an assortment of structural and fill elements. This site-casting approach, in contrast to the Rakowiec's precasting, imagined a new method of standardization deployable anywhere

in postwar Warsaw. Koło adapted, conceptually and literally, the past to the present.

Public and Private: The Politics of Relationships

Bergamo caused, or at least initiated, a rupture more complex than political allegiances or professional affiliations. Performing self-critique and renouncing her own past meant blurring Syrkus's personal and public lives. It pointed to a crisis of ideas deeper than Socialist Realism and longer lasting in its effects than the era of Stalinism. For Syrkus, a survivor of the recent war whose Jewish identity had always entailed personal and public dimensions, distancing herself from her past and her friendships was just one of many difficult but necessary decisions, one contingent act that resulted from and would surely precipitate many others. Cold War politics in the late 1940s and early 1950s increasingly invaded Syrkus's international relationships. Her attendance at CIAM meetings sharply decreased after Bergamo, only to be rekindled at the end of the Stalinist period in 1956 when Szymon attended the Dubrovnik meeting.⁸¹ Her close relationships with Le Corbusier, Cornelis van Eesteren, Sigfried Giedion, and other members grew tense, even fell apart. Criticizing the Athens Charter and condemning her colleagues—"one reproaches Le Corbusier for his phrase 'machine a habiter,'" she said—Syrkus made the choice to put politics over profession, ideology over friendship.

The dynamics of Syrkus's politics and friendships are well-demonstrated by her letters to Walter and Ise Gropius in the late 1940s, as Cold War politics began influencing their conversations. From 1945 to 1950, her letters to the Gropiuses evolved from the intimacy of close friends to the awkwardness of physical distance and polarized politics. Following her visit with Szymon to the Gropius family home in in 1946 and friendly

correspondence for the next couple of years, things began to change. The friendship eventually came to end in November 1950 amid a fiery exchange of letters, resulting in fifteen-year period of silence.⁸²

Syrkus's February 1948 letter to the Gropiuses began on an awkward note. One of Walter's Harvard students, Henry Cobb, who was helping the Syrkuses and Maciej Nowicki publish their article in the *TASK* journal, had recently Warsaw to document its ruins and obtain a close view of the city's reconstruction.⁸³ Hermann Field, architect and organizer of the trip, was mysteriously kidnapped and imprisoned, resulting in unsettled suspicions that Syrkus may have informed on him to *Bezpieka*, the state security service. While her role in the matter was never confirmed nor denied, she wrote to the Gropiuses that "the purpose of this letter is a very simple human need to tell our best friends that, despite the distance in space and time, we love you faithfully and we are often thinking of you, even if from the outside it looks like we have forgotten all and everything."⁸⁴ As either an attempt by to reassure her friends of her loyalty or an effort to compensate for the fact that she was being forced to weaponize their friendship for political reasons, Syrkus covered the situation with the promise of her friendship.

Around this same time, Syrkus began to participate in the World Peace Council, an international and Soviet-backed movement that opposed atomic and nuclear proliferation. Although its stated aims were noble, it became known for its pro-Soviet propaganda and routine displays of opposition to the "imperialism" and "warmongering" of the United States. Joining the ranks of international leftist figures like Pablo Picasso, Aldous Huxley, Bertold Brecht, and Pablo Neruda, Syrkus gave a speech at the 1948 World Congress of Intellectuals in Defense of Peace in Wrocław which preceded the

official formation of the Council. It was on the topic of this movement for world peace that in November 1950 Syrkus's increasingly strained and politicized correspondence with the Gropiuses reached its tipping point.

Since 1939, communication between the Syrkus and the Gropiuses had been equally personal, professional, and political. From her pleading letters in January 1939 to her upbeat telegram from the ruins of Warsaw in June 1945, Syrkus's relationship to her friends had always spanned between the anecdotes of personal friendship and the formalities of politics and profession. In the November 1950 exchange, however, "the vast anonymity of propaganda" pushed by Syrkus made this interpenetration unbearable for Ise Gropius. Just a year had passed since the Bergamo speech, when Syrkus alienated many CIAM members, including—though from a distance—the Gropiuses. The German couple's decreased involvement with the CIAM was largely the result of Walter's expanding design and teaching practice, as well as increasing responsibilities at Harvard due to increased enrollment from the American GI Bill.⁸⁵ In the initial letter from Syrkus, she urged her friends to sign the World Peace Council's Stockholm Declaration while abruptly criticizing their distance from the task of realizing socialism:

[regarding Socialist Realism]: In Bergamo they refused to take up such a discussion—a pity, we thought. It seems CIAM is degenerating, secluded as it is in its ivory tower. But time is too scarce for us to tackle this discussion by correspondence; you do not come to Europe, and as for ourselves—glad though we should be to see you again—we simply cannot spare the time. [...] For progress in our country on its way to Socialism is indeed breathtakingly rapid, and you, a born pedagogue, know only too well from experience that we ourselves develop best exactly through an integral co-operation with our pupils. Here—in Poland—another yet more powerful stimulus for the development of intellectuals is their co-operation with workers, with the entire working-class. Not just declaratory, dear friend, but real, daily, deep-reaching co-operation.⁸⁶

For Syrkus, who took pride in the proximity of her work to workers, the Gropiuses' silence revealed the hollowness of their leftist politics. Beyond their casual support for

global peace, they lacked “co-operation with workers” and direct intervention in the relations of production.⁸⁷ The Gropiuses’ German origins suddenly became a potential point of contention. Never before had their ancestry been a problem; Ise was herself Jewish, and Walter, long opposed to the Nazis, had fled Germany before the war. But for Syrkus in this moment, it seemed that no subject was off-limits to politics; no personal backstory transcended the urgency of the moment:

we are well aware of the existence of forces which are afraid of the successful development of People’s Poland, the German Democratic Republic and all those countries who, in reliance on the USSR , are building—*sensu stricto*—a better world. From the German Democratic Republic, your Old Country, the best people come to visit us, and there is no more ill-feeling, no grievance between us, just as we felt no ill-feeling or grievance towards you both when, immediately after the nightmare of Oświęcim, you took such very good care of Szymon in your Lincoln cottage.⁸⁸

Invoking the visit to the Gropius house in spring 1946, Syrkus seemed to cross the line for Ise Gropius, who was clearly hurt by receiving such harsh words from a close friend. Noting that the rudeness of Syrkus’s insinuations and the underlying essentialist ideology suggested that the letter was written under pressure and possibly even duress, Ise responded:

Dear Helena,
your letter is very hard to answer, but then, it wasn’t really a letter, was it? After having known you for so many years and having heard so many good personal and professional discussions between you and Szymon and Walter we do not want to start to speak to each other through a megaphone in the language of political treatises and clichés. But I am afraid that is exactly what you have done in your letter though you may not realize it.”⁸⁹

Explaining that she was open to having conversation but closed to Syrkus’s harsh and propagandistic tone, Ise followed her initial response with the appeal of friendship:

We are ready to discuss anything, but we are tired of sermons, even if they are delivered in your warm, infectious manner. And, I think, that goes for CIAM too. We shall always be highly interested in your work and we love you as long as you permit us to love you as individuals. But when you withdraw into the vast anonymity of propaganda it becomes another matter.⁹⁰

Syrkus did not return a reply; the exchange appeared to end the friendship, as it in fact

would for the next fifteen years. While the Syrkuses maintained their friendship with CIAM members Cornelis van Eesteren and Frieda Fluck, the next time Helena and Ise communicated was in 1965, after the death of Szymon and of Le Corbusier.

Salvaging the Past: 1950—1965

It was in the immediate fallout of Le Corbusier's death in late August 1965 that Syrkus reached out to the Gropiuses and told them about Szymon's recent death. Skirting past the awkward exchange of November 1950, she warmly reminisced about her friendship with the Gropiuses in the past and recalled, in particular, how nice it was to visit them in Massachusetts in 1946. Over a decade had passed since Stalinism ended in Poland, and it seemed that it was time to rekindle her warm friendship with the Gropiuses. The tone of the letter was humble and polite, a contrast to what Ise Gropius had described as the "snobbism" of the letter fifteen years earlier. Syrkus noted her own declining health, the fact that she was about to retire from her teaching position at Warsaw Polytechnic, and her modest lifestyle as a roommate of her sister Irena in an apartment near the Polytechnic and Warsaw's Royal Baths park.

And now a few words about my present situation. I live with Irena, my younger sister, we love each other very much and are best friends. We have a beautiful cat. For the Warsaw conditions we have a beautiful apartment—each of us has its own large room, a hall, a large kitchen where we have breakfast, a bathroom, etc.—everything that we need.⁹¹

Bolesław Stelmach insightfully notes that whereas the late 1940s saw Syrkus's dreams transform into reality, by the 1960s she had returned to reality. In 1946, a version of *Functional Warsaw*, as it appeared in *Warsaw Lives Again*, was actually being built as a new socialist Poland emerged. On the other hand, the Gropiuses in the late 1940 had less promising career opportunities, teaching at Harvard and pursuing small architectural

commissions that were nothing of the scale of an entire city. In a real turn of events over the next fifteen years, Syrkus found herself widowed, humbly housed, and near retirement; the Gropiuses were enjoying prominence in the American architectural community and the accolades of successful careers.⁹² This swap of circumstances, an inversion of Syrkus's 1946 career transformation from activist to communist bureaucrat, demonstrates how Syrkus's life and practice were always experimental—that although politically she conceived of herself as part of a continuous historical movement toward socialist revolution, she never followed a clear narrative trajectory.

To cleanly fit Syrkus into the “traitor” or “loyalist” categories because of her actions at Bergamo in 1949 would be to overlook the complexity of her decisions. To call her a bad friend to the Gropiuses would be to relegate her to November 1950 without putting the letter in the context of spring 1946 or August 1965. Her shifting allegiances after 1945 are symptoms of far deeper conflicts between her wartime experience, the politics of her Jewish identity, her enduring quest for socialism, and impasses between politics and friendship.

For Syrkus, uncertainty was possibility as much as it was precarity. Although the war interrupted her career and destroyed her world, her propaganda work with the BOS and *Warsaw Lives Again* showed that such destruction could make *Functional Warsaw* into a reality. Ruins were not relics of trauma; they were ingredients of a new political reality that *Warsaw Lives Again* would broadcast to the world and raw materials for construction. Some ties had to be ruptured in order to maintain others, some granular details had to be held loosely in order to bring about the larger revolution. This chapter demonstrates that the interpenetration of Syrkus's public and private life, brought to light

by her self-critiques in 1949 and her letter in 1950, should be understood within a constellation of contingent decisions beginning back in 1939. Taking advantage of friendships and relationships in order to save her own life was an aspect of Syrkus's life that began as the war began and continued after, just as her architecture after 1945 drew heavily on her work before. In this way, Syrkus's life was her architecture. As she designed exhibitions, photobooks, propaganda shows, and political speeches, her life iterated, adapted, and unfolded in time. In a world where "the space for being 'unengaged' dissolved,"⁹³ employment recommendation letters meant the difference between escape and deportation; telegrams sent from the ashes of Warsaw atoned for six years' worth of professional isolation and interrupted friendship; renouncing one's past meant a chance to continue it.

¹ Helena Syrkus, "Art Belongs to the People," in *Architecture Culture 1943–1968. A Documentary Anthology*, eds. Joan Ockman and Edward Eigen (New York: Columbia Books of Architecture, Rizzoli, 1993), 121-122.

² Syrkus, "Art Belongs," 121.

³ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴ Helena Syrkus. *Helena Syrkus to Walter and Ise Gropius*, November 4, 1950. Letter. Reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM: Listy Heleny Syrkus*, eds. Aleksandra Kędziołek et. al. (Warsaw: National Institute of Architecture and Urbanism, 2019), 254-256.

⁵ Syrkus, "Art Belongs," 121-122.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁷ In Polish: Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa.

⁸ Syrkus, "Art Belongs," 121.

⁹ Helena Syrkus. *Helena Syrkus to Walter Gropius and Sigfried Giedion*. January 24 1939, Letter. Translation in *Archipelag CIAM*, 79.

¹⁰ Syrkus, "Art Belongs," 122.

¹¹ Helena and Szymon Syrkus, "Self-Criticism (Samokrytyka)" Speech transcript, Warsaw, June 1949, Archive of New Files, Polish United Workers' Party. Central Committee, 2/1354/0.

¹² Ockman and Eigen, *Architecture Culture*, 120. The years of the Polish Thaw, roughly 1956-1957, were marked by more liberal politics by the new president, Władysław Gomułka, and public criticism of the previous, Stalinist regime as a "distortion of socialism."

¹³ Michał Głowiński, *The Black Seasons*, 1999. trans. Marci Shore. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005.

¹⁴ Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*, 1953. trans. Jane Zielonk (New York: Random House, Inc., 1990), 3, 54.

¹⁵ Aleksandra Kędziołek et. al., eds. "Postscript," *Archipelag CIAM: Listy Heleny Syrkus*, (Warsaw: National Institute of Architecture and Urbanism, 2019), 374.

¹⁶ Marta Leśniakowska, "An Unfinished Project: Helena Syrkus, Szymon Syrkus," in *Out of the Ordinary: Polish Designers of the 20th Century*, ed. Czesława Frejlich (Warsaw: Adam Mickiewicz Institute, 2011), 160.

¹⁷ The Brukalskis were important associates of the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (WSM) for which the Syrkuses also worked. They also attended and taught at Warsaw Polytechnic, paralleling the Syrkuses' time there. Bohdan Lachert was an important Polish architect who was tasked with finishing part of Maciej Nowicki's design for the center of Warsaw, after the Second World War and Nowicki's departure to the United States. Władysław Strzemiński was a Polish painter, married to Constructivist sculptor Katarzyna Kobro, who developed the theory of Unism (Unizm, in Polish) in the 1920s. He ended up in Łódź after the Second World War, where he fell into disrepute, unemployment, and eventually death (Refer to Chapter 1). Katarzyna Kobro, who grew up in Moscow, was affiliated with Russian avant-garde artists like Casimir Malevich and Vladimir in the Moscow Union of Artists to which she had belonged in the late 1910s and early 1920s.

¹⁸ CIRPAC was the executive body of CIAM. In French: *Comité international pour la résolution des problèmes de l'architecture contemporaine*; in English: International Committee for the Resolution of Problems in Contemporary Architecture.

¹⁹ In Polish: Stowarzyszenie Architektów Polskich. A professional association for architects, akin to the American Institute of Architects in the United States or the Royal Institute of British Architects in the UK. Szymon's removal from Functional Warsaw would constitute, as Helena later put it, the project being "stolen" from the couple. See Helena Syrkus. *Helena Syrkus to Walter Gropius*, January 24 1939. Letter. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 71-75.

²⁰ Several members of Syrkus's family, including her mother, went to North America. Many went to New York City or Vancouver, British Columbia. Her sister Martha, Home Army messenger during the Second Uprising, joined her mother in Vancouver after the war, eventually starting her own family there. See "Eliasberg" in Obituary Section, *The Vancouver Sun* (March 13 1963), 43.

²¹ Helena and Szymon Syrkus. *Helena and Szymon Syrkus to Frieda Fluck and Cornelis van Eesteren*, January 10 1939. Letter. Translation in *Archipelag CIAM*, 55.

²² Helena Syrkus. *Helena Syrkus to Walter Gropius*, January 24 1939. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 71-75.

- ²³ Helena Syrkus. *Helena Syrkus to Walter Gropius and Sigfried Giedion*, January 24 1939. Letter. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 77-85.
- ²⁴ Walter Gropius. *Walter Gropius to Catherine Bauer*, February 15 1939. Reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 86-88; Catherine Bauer to Walter Gropius, February 25 1939. Letter. Reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 90; *Walter Gropius to Helena Syrkus*, March 3 1939. Letter. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 93.
- ²⁵ Cornelis van Eesteren and Frieda Fluck. *Cornelis van Eesteren and Frieda Fluck to Werner Max Moser, Rudolf Steiger, Max Ernst Haefeli, Sigfried Giedion, Francis Quétant, Hans Schmidt, Walter Gropius, and Eufemie Moser*, February 26 1940. Letter. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 114-119.
- ²⁶ Sigfried Giedion. *Sigfried Giedion to Aleksander Evreinov*, October 8 1940. Letter. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 121-123.
- ²⁷ Wladimir Eliasberg. *Wladimir Eliasberg to Walter Gropius*, October 14 1940. Letter. Reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 124.
- ²⁸ Walter Gropius. *Walter Gropius to Alvin Johnson*, October 15 1940. Reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 128-130.
- ²⁹ Pat Johnson, "Learning his family's history: George Heyman," *Jewish Independent Canada*, April 7, 2017. <<https://www.jewishindependent.ca/tag/george-heyman/>> Accessed February 3, 2021.
- ³⁰ Kędziołek et. al., *Archipelag CIAM*, 392.
- ³¹ Szymon Syrkus. *Szymon Syrkus to Sigfried Giedion, Werner Max Moser, Alfred Roth, Rudolf Steiner, and Hans Schmidt*, June 12 1945, Letter. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 149.
- ³² Helena Syrkus. *Helena Syrkus to Walter Gropius*, June 6 1945. Telegram. Bauhaus Archive, Correspondence between Walter Gropius, Szymon Syrkus, Helena Syrkus, Inv. Nr. 657893 <[http://open-archive.bauhaus.de/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultListView/result.t1.collection_list.\\$TspTitleImageLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=0&sp=3&sp=SdetailList&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=0](http://open-archive.bauhaus.de/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultListView/result.t1.collection_list.$TspTitleImageLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=0&sp=3&sp=SdetailList&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=0)> Accessed January 5, 2021.
- ³³ Walter Gropius. *Walter Gropius to Helena Syrkus*, July 3, 1945. Telegram. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 140.
- ³⁴ Walter Gropius. *Walter Gropius to James F. Byrnes*, July 3 1945. Letter. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 142.
- ³⁵ Walter Gropius. *Walter Gropius to Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society*, July 20 1945. Letter. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 146.
- ³⁶ Helena Syrkus. *Helena Syrkus to Walter Gropius*, August 3, 1945. Telegram. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 150.
- ³⁷ Walter Gropius became an American citizen in 1944.
- ³⁸ The exhibition also appeared under the name *Will Warsaw Live Again?*.
- ³⁹ Helena and Szymon Syrkus. *Helena and Szymon Syrkus to Stanisław Tolwiński*, May 4 1946. Letter. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 199. AIA stands for the American Institute of Architects.
- ⁴⁰ Helena and Szymon Syrkus. *Helena and Szymon Syrkus to Ise and Walter Gropius*, March 13 1946. Letter. Reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 177.
- ⁴¹ Szymon and Helena Syrkus, "Basic Outlines of Warsaw's Planning," Speech transcript, The New School for Social Research (New York, NY, April 20 1946), 2. From Dorothy Newman papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, Folder Copy (accession 2, Pre-1990 Acquisitions, 1908-1983), Box 89, YCAL MSS 792.
- ⁴² Szymon and Helena Syrkus, Speech at New School, 1.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 1-4.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 6.
- ⁴⁶ Syrkus, Speech at New School, 7. Bierut, a Communist and at the time a member of the national front party Democratic Bloc (Blok Demokratyczny), was elected president in 1947. The 1947 legislative election was marked by extensive voter fraud, with Bierut winning 80% of the national vote and his opponent Stanisław Mikołajczyk getting just over 10%.
- ⁴⁷ Syrkus, Speech at New School, 3.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Helena and Szymon Syrkus. *Helena and Szymon Syrkus to Stanisław Tolwiński*, May 4 1946. Letter. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 199.
- ⁵⁰ Lewis Mumford, "Introduction" in Stanisław Albrecht, *Warsaw Lives Again!* trans. Tomar Green and Aleksy Czerwinski. Washington: Library of Congress Committee on Exhibition, 1946.
- ⁵¹ Stanisław Albrecht, *Warsaw Lives Again!* trans. Tomar Green and Aleksy Czerwinski. Washington:

Library of Congress Committee on Exhibition, 1946.

⁵² Helena and Szymon Syrkus. *Helena and Szymon Syrkus to Stanisław Tolwiński*, May 4 1946. Letter. Translation reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 199. While Albrecht was credited as the author, Helena Syrkus indicated to Tolwiński that she and Szymon had written most of it.

⁵³ Albrecht, *Warsaw Lives Again!*, 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁷ Szymon and Helena Syrkus, Speech at New School, 1.

⁵⁸ Syrkus, "Art Belongs," 122.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 13. For more on the reconstruction effort in 1945 and 1946, see Maciej Nowicki's proposal in Chapter 2.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁶⁴ Helena and Szymon Syrkus, Matthew Nowicki, "Reconstruction: Warsaw," ed. Seymour Stillman *TASK: A Magazine for Architects and Planners* (1948), 47-49.

⁶⁵ Nancy Craig. Interview with Helena and Szymon Syrkus. Radio. New York City, April 25 1946. Reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 184-197.

⁶⁶ Helena Syrkus, "Art Belongs to the People," 121-122.

⁶⁷ Syrkus, Speech at New School, 3.

⁶⁸ Praesens. "osiedle warszawskiej spoldzielni mieszkaniowej na rakowcu," *Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, no. 5 (1931): 2-12.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 10

⁷⁴ Helena and Szymon Syrkus, "Planning & Housing in Warsaw," in *Architects' Yearbook 3*, eds. Jane Drew and Trevor Dannatt (London: Paul Elek Books, 1949), 56.

⁷⁵ Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s*, trans. Pellegrino d'Acierno, Robert Connolly. (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1987), 207.

⁷⁶ Syrkus, *Architects' Yearbook*, 55-63.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 55-56

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁸¹ Ockman and Eigen, *Architecture Culture*, 120.

⁸² Helena Syrkus. *Helena Syrkus to Walter and Ise Gropius*, November 4 1950. Reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 254-256. For her attempt to initiate conversation fifteen years later, see Helena Syrkus. *Helena Syrkus to Ise and Walter Gropius*, August 28 1965. Letter. Reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 277-283.

⁸³ Syrkus and Nowicki, *TASK*, 47-49.

⁸⁴ Helena and Szymon Syrkus. *Helena and Szymon Syrkus to Ise and Walter Gropius*, February 1948. Letter. Reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 233. Bezpieka is shorthand for the Ministry of Public Security (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, MBP), Poland's secret police under the supervision of the PZPR.

⁸⁵ Walter Gropius. *Walter Gropius to Helena and Szymon Syrkus*, April 20 1948. Reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 244. "GI Bill" is short form for *Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944*, U.S. legislation that provided a range of benefits for returning American servicemen from the Second World War. Low-interest rate mortgage, education, and business loans were important aspects, resulting in a boom in the number of American university students in years after.

⁸⁶ Helena Syrkus. *Helena Syrkus to Walter and Ise Gropius*, November 4 1950. In *Archipelag CIAM*, 254-256.

⁸⁷ Walter Benjamin, The Author As Producer," 1934. *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, Thomas Y.

Levin (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008),

⁸⁸ Ibid., 257. Oświęcim is the Polish name for Auschwitz.

⁸⁹ Ise Gropius. *Ise Gropius to Helena Syrkus*, November 1950. Letter, *Archipelag CIAM*, 262.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 264.

⁹¹ Helena Syrkus. *Helena Syrkus to Ise and Walter Gropius*, August 28 1965. Letter. Reprinted in *Archipelag CIAM*, 277-283.

⁹² Bolesław Stelmach, "Instead of a Foreword," in *Archipelag CIAM*, 8-9.

⁹³ Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918-1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 9.

Chapter 4

Performing Reality: Tadeusz Kantor

On a cold day in Warsaw in early December 1965, a bunch of people huddled into a small café on Chmielna Street. Awaiting what was supposed to be a theatrical performance, everyone sat or stood so close together that it was difficult to distinguish between the audience, the people who were planning to perform, and those working at the restaurant. At some point the action began, however, loosening the strange, almost comedic tension in the room. A man began eating spaghetti out of a travel suitcase. Someone else started shaving their face with the naïve confidence of someone in the privacy of a bathroom. The man did not appear embarrassed when the white cream began spilling all over the floor and others seated nearby, making it unclear whether this was a mistake, an unexpected intrusion into the room, or part of the act. Tadeusz Kantor, the director, was now in a corner of the room wrapping his wife Maria in tape, slowly transforming her into a mummy. A mixture of other strange or strangely banal activities followed, blending the commotion into an image of chaos and absurdity. While each event developed independently, even disregarding others around it, Kantor seemed to retain control:

At a certain moment Kantor left these activities in order to scold two intruders, who had seized the suitcase with the pasta and were throwing the suitcase's contents around the room – this wasn't part of the plan. Kantor didn't accept the occurrence of this spontaneous activity. He reproached the two intruders.¹

People watched others while they themselves were watched. Performing and spectating seemed to be indistinguishable in this crowded space. Private, ordinary acts became exceptional as they were removed from their usual contexts: “activities were deprived of their practical function,” Kantor reflected, each one becoming “‘doomed’ to rely on its

own development.”² *Cricotage* demonstrated that when everyday acts are “performed for an audience,” they “become absurd.”³ The seemingly spontaneous but actually planned event in the Warsaw café was one iteration in Kantor’s larger body of theatrical and visual art that had been questioning the boundaries between everyday life and theater since the German occupation in the early 1940s when Kantor ran a makeshift, clandestine theater out of a damaged Kraków house. His larger portfolio of set designs, performances, paintings, and other visual arts constantly interrogated the artistic potentials of action and process, as opposed to metaphor and figuration. Collapsing the distance between “fiction” and “truth,” Kantor amplified, blurred, and eroded notions of symbolism and meaning altogether. By creating performances that acted against, within, or in collusion with the political and cultural realities he knew, Kantor developed an alternative career that intervened in disciplinary traditions and space.

Reality Invades the Stage: 1915-1945

Born in 1915 in the Austrian Galician town of Wielopole, Kantor grew up in a half Polish, half Jewish environment. The ethnic complexity of his formative years would haunt his later work, manifesting in frequent references to the Holocaust and themes of nostalgia and trauma. During his early studies at the regional high school in Tarnów, Kantor excelled in ancient languages, painting, and theater before he left for dual painting and theater design studies at Kraków’s renowned Academy of Fine Arts in the late 1930s. As the political situation intensified in Poland and in Europe more broadly, Kantor studied constructivism, explored the work of the German Bauhaus, and organized a student-run puppet theater at the Academy.

Following the invasion in 1939, the early years of the war were especially difficult for Kantor. In 1940 his father was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he was later killed. Without much family support, Kantor picked up work as a room painter. But amid so much uncertainty and danger, Kantor was productive in other ways. He and some friends began to stage theater productions in a recently damaged room. It came to be called Kantor's Independent Theater. Since "to live normally in occupied Europe meant breaking the law,"⁴ everything had to remain a secret. To continue their artistic interests in Kraków's underground society, the Independent Theater staged the Polish classic *Balladyna*, *The Death of Orpheus* by Jean Cocteau, and Stanisław Wyspiański's *The Return of Odysseus* in spite of the Germans' official, death penalty-backed ban on artistic activity.⁵ Performance tactics for which Kantor would later become well-known—collapsing the space of the stage into the outside world, confusing the audience as to who was performing and who was "real"—were at this moment simple conditions of the work. The Independent Theater tried to not only situate, but *transform* the content of dramatic texts with the physical context of the auditorium and surrounding city.

Late in the war when Kantor staged *The Return of Odysseus*, "pieces of furniture [were] pushed aside" and "those who have come to watch sit wherever they can."⁶ Smallness and discomfort were unavoidable. Kantor wanted to "place actors among simple parcels," "take away their costumes," and "introduce coincidence" so as to bring the outside world in.⁷ The play was not set in the past, where it might serve as an illusionary "escape from reality." With Odysseus dressed as a German soldier, the play's protagonist started out as the enemy; the setting was not Ithaca, but an everyday scene in wartime Kraków. As Kantor wrote:

The realness of *The Return of Odysseus* becomes more real every day.

The German retreat was in full swing.

The newspapers announced the invasion of Allied forces on the opening night. It was necessary to leave aesthetic, ornamental, and abstract constructions aside. The space, which was delineated perfectly by the art's parameters, was invaded brutally by a "real object."

*It is necessary to bring a work of art in theater to such a point of intensity that only one step separates drama from life, performer from audience.*⁸

Such a scary and turbulent world was more exciting than anything a theater text could recall, imagine, or produce. Odysseus "had a terrorizing effect as the audience slowly realized that the rugged soldier was actually an actor,"⁹ starting out as a German soldier and only later becoming a "performer." As Kantor wrote in his theater notes, the "reality of drama must become the reality on stage. The stage 'matter' [...] must not be stifled or covered up with illusion. It must stay crude and raw. It must be ready to face and clash with a new reality, that of drama."¹⁰ Kantor transformed a German soldier into Odysseus. Reality became fiction.

The cramped, damaged room became both a condition of the performance and a material aspect of it. What Kantor called the "growth" of the drama was not the result of a narrative. "The plot development should be spontaneous and unpredictable," Kantor wrote. Events *might* or *might not* occur, depending on interactions between stage elements, actors, and audience members. *The Return of Odysseus* reflected the influence of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty by "bringing the audience into direct contact with the dangers of life [and] turning theatre into a place where the spectator is exposed rather than protected."¹¹ The plot unfolded beyond the original Wyspiański text as Odysseus the German soldier presented a real, impending threat to the audience all the way until the moment he was exposed as an actor. Instead of building a narrative, the play was a series of potential, contingent, dangerous events.

Expansion and Autonomy: 1945-1960

In 1945 and 1946, as the war ended and Poland's rebuilding effort began, Kantor began building stage sets for Kraków's theaters, including the Rotunda, Old, and Public. He also published articles on stage design, including an article on best practices in the Polish Art Review (*Przegląd Artystyczny*). Following his time in the Independent Theater, Kantor became known for stages in which reality "intrudes on the world created by the artist,"¹² in which the process was the content. In 1946 and 1947, he received a scholarship to study art in Paris, where he began frequenting art galleries and acquainting himself with the work of Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Joan Miró, Max Ernst, and Hans Hartung.

After a visit to the 1946 International Exhibition at the French Museum of Modern Art, in 1948 Kantor returned to Kraków and opened his own exhibition of modern Polish art. Focusing closely on painting, he soon took a position on the faculty of his alma mater, the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts. This career stability dissolved in 1949, however, when Kantor publicly refused Socialist Realism and consequently lost his job at the Academy. Until the loosening of mandates during the Polish "Thaw" of the mid-1950s, his job prospects were limited, with stage design gigs at Kraków's Old Theater and for the State Dramatic Theaters Association.¹³

On the side, however, Kantor was initiating another informal theater group, eventually called Cricot II. Although not technically illegal as the Independent Theater had been, Cricot II was one of the few theater practices in 1950s Poland that lacked state subsidies. Begun in 1955, the group was financially limited but largely free to define its performance techniques and content.¹⁴ As with most associated architects, painters, and

posters, however, the theater associated with ZPAP. Kantor's idea of "autonomy"—a notion that performance should not rely on a given text or set of conventions—emerged in his writings as the members of Cricot II learned to operate autonomously, without the support of the MKS. A year before the June 1956 workers' protests in Poznań that led to the end of Poland's Stalinist period and ushered in the era of Władysław Gomułka's more liberal government, Kantor was already setting the stage for his theater practice of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s.

In 1955, Kantor returned to Paris for a theater festival. Acquainting himself with six years' worth of development in painting, he encountered works by Jean Fautrier, Georges Mathieu, and Jackson Pollock, becoming especially interested in Art Informel, tachisme, and abstract expressionism. These artists' conceptions of their work as action rather than object resonated with Kantor's own evolving approach in painting and theater. In the "Autonomous Theater" manifesto, begun in 1956 and finished in 1961, Kantor dispensed with figuration, metaphor, and quotation altogether. Theater was not a "reproductive mechanism,"¹⁵ but a mode of performance that eroded text so that each theatrical spectacle was its own, freestanding form. Kantor wanted to create "such reality, such plots of events that have neither logical, analogical, parallel, nor juxtaposed relationship."¹⁶ To "crush the impregnable shell of drama," subjectivity invaded the script. Actors' lines were

not presented but
discussed,
commented upon;
the actors speak the lines,
reject them,
return to them,
and repeat them;
the parts are not assigned
thus, the actors do not identify with the text.

The performance turns into
a mill grinding the text.¹⁷

Improvisation, in which the text became an artifact instead of a guide, penetrated the diegetic level with the decisions and ephemeral actions of performers. Since “the goal [was] not to create an illusion on stage (distant, safe), but to create reality as concrete as the auditorium,” chance had to invade the script. The text was degraded as the drama was generated. “The drama on stage does not ‘happen,’” as Kantor explained, “it is created.”¹⁸ Although his idea was autonomy, this very concept seemed to come from somewhere else. In the 1920s, Polish writer Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy) had coined “Pure Form,” describing “a certain construction of any given elements, such as sounds, colors, words, or actions combined with utterances” that rejected “imitation of life and the world” in theater. Pure Form created “unity, which cannot be reduced to anything.”¹⁹ Similarly, Kantor’s theater was a “nullification of phenomena, elements, events” that “relieves [actions] of the burden of leading a practical life and allows them to turn into the stage matter that is moulded independently.”²⁰ There would be no specific meaning to extract; each action on stage, dispersed among actors and objects, produced its own.

As an approach to theater that “deliberately negates, or at least relegates to the background, the possibility of developing a narrative,” Kantor’s theater has been described as “postdramatic.”²¹ Recurrent notions of uselessness and ephemerality often discouraged Kantor’s audiences from trying to find a narrative altogether. He created “uselessness” by positioning actors and audience members in close proximity in cramped and uncomfortable spaces. As far back as *The Return of Odysseus*, when the damaged room in wartime Kraków made such a space necessary, the stage was so small and cluttered that—as Kantor put it—it

nearly ceases to exist.
 Its size could be equated with “zero.”
 It is so small and infinitesimal that
 actors have to
 fight from being
 pushed aside.²²

Degrading stage elements and actors by placing them difficult proximities, Kantor “nullified” the supposed falseness of everyday human façades. He had his actors obsessively repeat actions and words until they everything became noise and a blur, achieving “a state of weightlessness” that “cleanse[d] the atmosphere from false myths.”²³ By forcibly removing the ability to withdraw into comfort, the Autonomous Theater extracted reality from performance.

In 1955 and 1956, Cricot II was neither housed in a permanent theater location nor permanently staffed. The group, an eclectic mix of Kantor’s friends, painters, amateur actors, and other artists, met in houses and buildings around Kraków. Their first performance was *Mątwą* (The Cuttlefish) in 1956, adapting Witkacy’s 1920 play about a group of misunderstood and unfulfilled artists with tumultuous personal lives. Kantor, as director, brought the serious tone of the original play into conflict with a slew of simple, found objects and the everyday environment of a café interior, forcing the existing text to clash with the surrounding reality in a somewhat comedic, absurd way. Drawing upon his established interest in puppet theater, which he had explored extensively in the late 1930s when he was a student, Kantor had his *Mątwą* actors move silently about the stage and behave like inanimate objects. Mannequins, marionettes, and other inanimate doubles continued into Kantor’s later productions in the 1960s and 70s, helping him to explore relationships between life and death, past and present, and the self and the other.

Written in 1961, Kantor’s Informel Theater manifesto intensified the process he

had laid out for the Autonomous Theater. Here, actors would be “crowded into the absurdly small space of a wardrobe; [...] squeezed between and mixed with dead objects (sacks, a mass of sacks), degraded, without dignity, [...] hanging motionless like clothes.”²⁴ Through the informel process, actors and audience members would discover “a new, unknown aspect of reality, of its elementary state, [...] MATTER.”²⁵ Being constricted in space, people were exposed, their personal “baggage” on display to everyone else in the room:

[the actor's] INDIVIDUALITY does not extend beyond [the stage] to create the illusion of being another character. Having done so, he would eliminate dependence on the arrangement that exists outside him, gain autonomy, and expose only himself and his own character, which are the only reality on stage. He would create his own chain of events, states, and situations that would either clash with those in the play or be somehow completely isolated from them.²⁶

For Kantor, emotional baggage that people carried inside—trauma, nostalgia, memories—were physically connected to the baggage they carried outside—clothing, suitcases, personal property. Analysis of one meant access to the other. In his paintings and theater productions from the time, Kantor became obsessed with the term *emballage*, expressing the dermic and metaphorical ways people wrap and thus conceal their true identities. Further developing an interest in the performative potential of inanimate objects, Kantor's writings on emballage imagined actors being disembodied by “an immense black sack” that consumed them by filling the stage. With “only their heads and hands [...] visible through the narrow openings in the sack,” bodies would form a collective “external surface” that existed autonomously.²⁷ In the 1965 *Cricotage* Happening in Warsaw, Kantor wrapped his wife in tape to transform her into a performer who was half-human, half-object. At *An Anatomy Lesson Based on Rembrandt* in 1969, Kantor “dis-emballaged,” “‘undressed’ his subjects, searching for deeper knowledge of

their psyches via the hidden crannies of their pockets.”²⁸ As he wrote in the script, “Just make the first step/ take the courage to separate something/ and you discover suddenly the new inner world.”²⁹

Through the notions of autonomy, informel, and emballage, Kantor’s theater work from the 1950s to 1960s explored the relationship between art and reality in new ways. Whereas autonomy attempted to dematerialize theatrical texts through rigorous and violent acts against it, and informel crowded out performance in order to reveal underlying truths about human experience, emballage returned to the object and attempted to materialize emotion as a way to gain access to the human interior. At each turn, Kantor continued to question barriers between performance and life, extending what he had problematized in his productions during the war in Stalinist and post-Stalinist contexts. His paintings and visual art evolved his conundrum onto canvas surfaces, as he began to physically incorporate found and worn-out objects into works and to approach art as documentary and forensic analysis of everyday life. He increasingly relocated objects—especially umbrellas—from their useful context and elevated them to subjects of his works, noting that “the very decision of using such a utilitarian object and of substituting it or the sacred object of artistic practices was, for me, a day of liberation through blasphemy.”³⁰ As “a ‘wrapping’ over many human affairs,” umbrellas disguised “uselessness, helplessness [and] ridiculousness,” just as metaphor, narrative, and tradition tried to dignify art.³¹ Often carried by characters in his plays, umbrellas made their way into many of his paintings.

Performing In The Open: 1960s

Desiring to move beyond the auditorium, in the 1960s Kantor took performance into the street. Taking a more politically active position and associating himself with “counterculture,” he exhibited his work internationally, led and taught student groups in Kraków’s visual and theater arts community, and increasingly referred to global political movements in his work. He moved more of his work to Warsaw, the center of political power, becoming affiliated with the city’s Foksal Gallery. As Kantor’s colleague Wiesław Borowski put it, “Foksal Gallery was an occasion for Kantor to mark his presence in Warsaw.”³² Kantor’s unusual and alternative career, once largely defined by its independence from the government and by its specific associations with Kraków, increasingly entered mainstream Polish culture. As the Polish government continued the public relations task of distancing itself from Stalinism and projecting images of international exchange, Kantor leveraged opportunities to broaden his international footprint.

In August 1961 Kantor took part in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, entitled “Fifteen Polish Painters.” Described as representatives of a “vital new art movement” liberating Polish culture from the legacies of Socialist Realism, artists including *Pass Me A Brick* painter Aleksander Kobzdej, *Figures* painter and professor at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts Wojciech Fangor, Polish émigré in Paris Jan Lebenstein, and many others represented to the world a new wave of post-Stalinist Polish art.³³ In the exhibition’s catalogue, Peter Selz described Kantor’s works as “thickly-textured, frightening and savage canvases with images reminding us of crater landscapes desolated by the flow of burning lava.”³⁴ Providing a space for abstract expressionism in

newly liberal Poland, Kantor's contribution to the MoMA exhibition participated in a larger transatlantic political confrontation between the United States and Soviet Union, one in which institutions like MoMA utilized the "neutrality" abstract art to counter European tradition and Soviet ideology.³⁵ Whether Kantor's participation was a rebellion or simply a means to expand his international career is unknown.

Having allowed the outside world to invade his theater for decades, during the 1960s Kantor's performances happened in restaurants, streets, even on the beach. As he would write, justifying the more tangibly political actions of his theater as it adapted to and took over new sites of social interaction and exhibition:

those places where the ambiguous
acts of representation and presentation take place,
those places where everything is justified by fiction,
[...]
had to be contested and
abandoned.³⁶

Global countercultural movements, especially the French Situationists and the "Happenings" trend initiated by Allan Kaprow began to gain cultural traction in a Polish artistic culture growing more resistant to the government by the day. Kantor's own Happenings, the first of which was *Cricotage* in 1965, were attempts to take over the public realm.

As has been discussed, *Cricotage* asserted a claim in its surrounding café space by elevating everyday tasks to public view. Like government surveillance, publicity brought life under scrutiny, transforming ordinariness into absurdity and ephemeral details into permanent memories. Knowing that the act of shaving is being publicly viewed, for instance, might bring a heightened level of self-awareness to the task. Watching someone else shave might infuse future interactions with that individual with embarrassment. But

actors and audience members had to come to terms with the fact that the situation of being watched was not actually unique. Government surveillance was happening. Daily tasks were, in fact, being scrutinized.

In August 1967, Kantor conducted a Happening on a beach along Poland's northern Baltic coast in which the spatiality of performance was called into question by the endlessness of the sea. Called the *Panoramic Sea Happening*, the event took place in multiple iterations over a three-week period. The first part was "The Sea Concert" in which painter Edward Krasiński stood on a partially submerged dais just a few meters into the water, "conducting" the incoming waves of the sea in a symphony. The concert's audience, sinking into the sand themselves as they sat in beach chairs behind him, watched Krasiński and the ocean perform together. The open sea inverted the interiority of performance into a stage that ebbed and flowed by non-human, natural forces. The incoming waves, rhythmically touching those seated in the audience, blurred the boundary between viewing and spectating realms. Another part of *Panoramic Sea Happening* reenacted Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of Medusa* painting from 1819. A group of the Happening's participants frantically built a raft of consumer objects—beach towels, buoys, bathing suits—as a series of serious, distinguished art lectures took place nearby. The Happening harnessed tensions between land and water, nostalgia and tourism, and limitlessness and isolation by transforming the sea and beach into an infinite theatrical space.³⁷

The same year, Kantor's staged *The Letter* in the streets of Warsaw. Whereas the outside world had long "intruded" Kantor's stages and the *Sea Happening* transformed the outside world into a stage, here theater invaded the city. A group of postmen carried a

massive, forty-foot-long letter from a post office to the Foksal Art Gallery, where they then cast the giant sheet into a crowd of people who were publicly reading their own private letters. The act of sending a message became a ritual and a parade, illuminating how private information exists in the public sphere. Long interested in letters and in liminal spaces, Kantor described the post office as

a very special place
 where the laws of
 utilization
 are suspended.
 Objects [...] exist for some time
 independently,
 without an addressee,
 without a place of destination,
 without a function,
 almost as if in a vacuum,
 [...]
 It is a rare moment when
 an object escapes its destiny.³⁸

The post office was a place where objects sent and received were suspended in anonymity. As with *Cricotage*, the *Letter* decontextualized an everyday act to “trouble recognized reality by bringing to the fore its unknown or illegitimate aspects.”³⁹ The letter’s destiny remained unknown until the end, when it vanished as an ephemera amid the spoken words of the crowd.

The Letter reflected the influence of Situationism in Kantor’s work, particularly the practice of *detournement* that recontextualized found objects in order to uncover their hidden, suppressed meanings. Writing about his Happenings and addressing the choice of identifying the work as either “art” or “reality,” Kantor noted that an existing theatrical was already a found object: “dramatic text is also a ‘ready-made’ object that has been formed outside the zone of performance and the audience’s reality. It is an object whose structure is dense and whose identity is delineated by its own fiction, illusion, and

psychophysical dimension.” To pretend that theater repeated the meanings and elicited the emotional responses that the text’s original author intended was to ignore the new environment in which the text operated, to be blind to its interactions with objects, people, and events. In this way, *The Letter* was a “process of annexing reality.”⁴⁰ It transformed Warsaw’s urban space into a realm for a new kind of political performance—one in which everyday life became spectacular. By being thrown into the crowd, the letter’s destiny was re-written; its movement through the public domain became a parade.

Kantor took similar approaches in his visual arts studios at the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts in the late 1960s. His students conducted a Happening at the Kraków train station in 1969, creating signs and ephemera to capture the attention of travelers and to intervene in a transitional, transient space. They experimented with emballage and their own forms of sculptural montage, integrating found objects like storage receptacles, ladders, clothing, footwear, and even toilet seats into their work. They brought theatrical techniques to exhibition space, staging their works in relation to movement, absurdity, and even violent juxtaposition. Putting contradictory or out-of-place elements into close proximity produced new meanings and exposed everyday absurdity.

Memory and Trauma: 1970s—

In addition to the term postdramatic, “post-traumatic” has described Kantor’s work.⁴¹ The trauma of the Second World War and Nazi occupation was prevalent in productions from Kantor’s later period, like *The Dead Class* of 1975 and *Wielopole*, *Wielopole* of 1981.⁴² *The Dead Class*, first produced as a stage production and then

released as a film by Andrzej Wajda in 1977, became one of the most well-traveled projects of Kantor's work, being emblematic of his "theater of death." *The Dead Class* was a cacophony of shrill voices, anguished facial expressions, and erratic movements that vaguely recalled human agony and desperation. Actors were already present in the dungeon-like space of the room when the audience arrived. They then proceeded to exit and re-enter the room, shrouding the rest of the event with an anticlimactic start. The performance, set among the unfinished stone walls and rough wooden classroom benches, was a death séance. Actors performed alongside inanimate doppelgangers. The repetition of Polish, Hebrew, and Yiddish words digressed into indiscernible sounds, augmenting the tension between actors and their mannequins. Kantor, as usual, stood among the actors; the entire event occurred as a miserable, uncontrollable memory.

The play's content, as with many of Kantor's works, remained elusive throughout the performance. Memories seemed to erode rather than produce meanings or messages. Early on, a woman who appeared to be dying gave birth on-stage, only to result in an empty, mysteriously rocking cradle. After the stunted opening scene, the recurring dead woman and her cradle implied that death could precede birth, that to be alive meant to be dying or dead already. While *The Dead Class* resonated universally and traveled widely, its content was Polish. During the Holocaust the Jewish population of Wielopole—where Kantor grew up—was decimated, being murdered on-site or sent to the extermination camp at Bełżec. Kantor's own father, as has been noted, was murdered at Auschwitz after being deported there in 1940. As in English, the Polish word *klasa* in the play's title could mean either a social or educational grouping. The first interpretation simply identified the Polish Jewish minority that had existed for centuries. The second

interpretation rendered the performance's space, resembling a school classroom, as an aspect of Kantor's own memory—perhaps the classroom where Kantor was educated as a child—that he could not escape. *Umarla*, the adjective for “dead,” is also the verb “died.” *The Dead Class* was also *The Class Died*: there was a class that died, but there was also the act of dying itself. Using a “profound but indirect, tragic but dignified, sorrowful but also fatalistically ironic” way of capturing collective trauma, *The Dead Class* told of the optimistic Polish nationalism of the early twentieth century.⁴³ Partitioned between Austria-Hungary, Prussia, and the Russia Empire since 1795, Polish society before the First World War was full of nationalistic expectancy. But forty years later, on the other side of the Second World War and Holocaust, this same generation was trapped “in one post-traumatic gesture; walking in circles, the pupils cannot escape their lives and deaths, they cannot undo what has happened.”⁴⁴

The work of Kantor did more than expose the contradictions of theater and daily life; it subverted, amplified, and even undid them. For him, performance and everyday reality were not mutually exclusive modes of action; they were interrelated, inescapable aspects of life with which to be dealt simultaneously. Kantor planned performances to be open-ended, anticipated undefined results. Riddled with its own contradictions, his practice meandered between control and ambivalence, the material and the metaphysical, form and process. His interventions in space, from the auditorium to the street, opened theater and other arts to everyday participation.

- ¹ Mariusz Tchorek, quote in “Cricotage – Tadeusz Kantor” trans. M.K., *Adam Mickiewicz Institute*, 2014. <<https://culture.pl/en/work/cricotage-tadeusz-kantor>> Accessed September 18, 2020.
- ² Wiesław Borowski. “Rozmowa z Tadeuszem Kantorem,” *Tadeusz Kantor* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1982), 85. Cited in “Cricotage 1965,” Cricoteka Archives. <<https://www.cricoteka.pl/pl/cricotage-1965-2/>> Accessed September 20, 2020.
- ³ Karolina Czerska, “Cricotage – Tadeusz Kantor,” trans. M.K., *Adam Mickiewicz Institute*, 2014. <<https://culture.pl/en/work/cricotage-tadeusz-kantor>> Accessed September 18, 2020.
- ⁴ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press), 37.
- ⁵ Kobińska, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 4.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.
- ⁷ Tadeusz Kantor, “Credo,” 1942-1944. In Kobińska, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 38.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ Magda Romanska, *The Post-traumatic Theater of Grotowski and Kantor: History and Holocaust in Akropolis and The Dead Class* (London: Anthem Press, 2012), 186.
- ¹⁰ Tadeusz Kantor, “Credo,” 37.
- ¹¹ Lee Jamieson, *Antonin Artaud: From Theory to Practice* (London: Greenwich Exchange, 2007), 23
- ¹² Cioffi, *Alternative Theater*, 44.
- ¹³ Kobińska, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 5.
- ¹⁴ Kathleen Cioffi, *Alternative Theater in Poland, 1954-1989* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1996), 46.
- ¹⁵ Tadeusz Kantor, “The Autonomous Theater,” 42.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.
- ¹⁸ Tadeusz Kantor, “Iluzja i Konkretnie Rzeczywistość,” 1942-1944. In *Metamorfozy: Teksty o latach 1934-1974*, ed. trans. Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2005), 59.
- ¹⁹ Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, “Pure Form in the Theater.” Lecture, Mały Theater, Warsaw, 29 December 1921. In *The Witkiewicz Reader*, ed. trans. Daniel Gerould (Great Britain: Quartet Books, 1993), 147.
- ²⁰ Tadeusz Kantor, “The Autonomous Theater,” 1956/1963. In Michał Kobińska, ed. trans., *A Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944-1990* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1993), 45.
- ²¹ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theater*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 68.
- ²² Kantor, “The Autonomous Theater,” 46.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 49.
- ²⁴ Kantor, “The Informel Theatre,” 1961. In Kobińska, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 53.
- ²⁵ Kantor, “The Informel Theatre, definitions.” Undated. In Kobińska, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 55.
- ²⁶ Tadeusz Kantor, “The Zero Theater,” In Kobińska, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 64.
- ²⁷ Kantor, “Emballages,” 1957. In Kobińska, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 77.
- ²⁸ Magda Romanska, *The Post-traumatic Theater of Grotowski and Kantor: History and Holocaust in Akropolis and The Dead Class* (London: Anthem Press, 2012), 190.
- ²⁹ Cited in *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ Kantor, “An Umbrella,” 1964. In Kobińska, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 82.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² Agnieszka Sural, Interview with Wiesław Borowski, April 1, 2015. trans. Marta Jazowska *Adam Mickiewicz Institute* <<https://culture.pl/en/article/trust-the-artist-an-interview-with-wieslaw-borowski>> Accessed January 10, 2021.
- ³³ “Fifteen Polish Painters,” Press Release. Museum of Modern Art, 1961. <https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_326242.pdf?_ga=2.267913032.736884630.1612640228-883123146.1612640228> Accessed February 6, 2021.
- ³⁴ Peter Selz, “15 Polish Painters,” exhibition catalogue (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961), 8.
- ³⁵ Eve Cockcroft, “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War,” in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock*

and After: The Critical Debate (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), 153.

³⁶ Tadeusz Kantor, "The Impossible Theater," 1969-1973. In Kobińska, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 99.

³⁷ Karolina Czerska, "Panoramic Sea Happening – Tadeusz Kantor," trans. M.K., *Adam Mickiewicz Institute*, 2014. < <https://culture.pl/en/work/panoramic-sea-happening-tadeusz-kantor> > Accessed 25 January 2021.

³⁸ Tadeusz Kantor, "Emballages," 1957-65. In Kobińska, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 82-83.

³⁹ Michał Kobińska, "Tadeusz Kantor's Happenings: Reality, Mediality, and History." *Theater Survey*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (May 2002), 70.

⁴⁰ Tadeusz Kantor, "Annexed Reality," 1963. In Kobińska, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 71.

⁴¹ Romanska, *Post-traumatic Theater of Grotowski and Kantor*.

⁴² Polish title of *The Dead Class*: Umarła Klasa.

⁴³ Romanska, *Post-Traumatic Theater*, 199.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

Chapter 5

Explicit Uncertainty: Oskar Hansen and Open Form

In the previous chapters, Polish artists and architects have developed alternative practices and acted in space by approaching uncertainty as a generative tension in which form emerges. But in this chapter, the architect Oskar Hansen makes uncertainty explicit. Through his theory of Open Form, architecture reconciles opposed extremes, emerges and evolves through iterations, and exists outside of history by making temporal processes its constituent elements. In September 1959, Hansen presented the theory of Open Form at the of the International Congress of Modern Architects' meeting in Otterlo, The Netherlands. As the organization disintegrated, and modern architecture itself seemed to be on trial, Hansen began his manifesto with a desire to find unity: "What do we have in common, and how are we to fight for it?"¹ For him, Open Form offered to salvage everything that was wrong with architecture. Organizing the talk into a "Closed" and "Open" binary, he described architecture's status quo and speculated on its future.

At the outset of Hansen's presentation in the Kröller-Müller Museum, the "what" of his problem and the "how" of his solution seemed clear enough. Closed Form was a tendency to fix architecture in particular programs, places, or epochs; to understand form as a static object that solves a given problem and is modified or replaced when the next problem arises; to reserve architectural agency for an oligarchy of experts who "know best." As one of only a few representatives from Eastern Europe and one of two from Poland,² Hansen engaged a group with lacked direct experience with Stalinism. The speech was more than a political critique of authoritarian states or "all-knowing" architects. By reimagining the relationships between architects and their constituents and

between form and history, Open Form promised to make architecture immortal. Whereas Closed Form was defined by the conceptual ideas of its author, Open Form was a continuous constructive process comprised of diffuse actions.

But the title Open Form complicated the binary between Closed and Open. Whereas Open suggested an ambivalence to shape, position, and meaning, “Form” denoted a particular entity, an identifiable “thing.” If this form could be opened to “changes in the mode of life,” as Hansen said, it would be alive and enduring. Whereas Closed Form was “obsolete before it is even realized,” Open Form was the “sum of events,” an evolving group form.³ With Open and Closed representing opposing ends of a spectrum that Open Form reconciled, Hansen’s manifesto proceeded to enact a variety of others. These oppositions, too, demonstrated both distinction and interplay. Some were explicit while others were implied. More than anything, they pointed to a condition of incompleteness. Terms reinforced the dichotomy between Closed and Open but also took part in semiotic relationships. Instead of picking between polarities, the terms of the Open Form positioned it along a spectrum from one extreme to the other.⁴ These “superficially opposed elements,” among others, were objective and subjective, collective and individual, maker and user, and quantity and quality.

“Society should make possible the development of the individual,” Hansen said. “There should be a synthesis between the objective social elements and the subjective individual elements.”⁵ For Hansen, Open Form was relational; interaction and experience expressed a larger group image. Spontaneous events did not threaten the form’s compositional unity, but instead made it humane, ensured longevity. The question of reconciling subjectivity with the objective needs of society meant accommodating

imperfection. The issue came up when one of the other attendees at Otterlo, Alison Smithson, criticized Hansen's work. Using drawings and photographs, Hansen had brought three examples to accompany the talk: his proposed extension to Warsaw's Zachęta Art Gallery, a proposed monument for the former concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and a recently completed expansion to the Rakowiec Housing Estate on the outskirts of Warsaw. Smithson was suspicious that the Rakowiec project had been designed arbitrarily, arguing that Hansen's choice to offset the floor plans of the building's apartment units did not result in a "real advantage" to the occupants.⁶ Hansen had to confront himself—acknowledge that the subjectivity of the Open Form architect deemed what was "subjective" and "objective."

"...the Closed Form [...] causes the individual to become lost in the collective," Hansen said; "The Open Form is to aid the individual in finding himself in the collective."⁷ Generational tensions at Otterlo, evident in the fact that the CIAM organization was in fact being abolished, reflected in the manifesto's subtitle, "The Art of the Great Number." "The sooner we cast off the shackles of the Closed Form—the form on which we have been brought up and consequently do not perceive its deleterious effect—the sooner we will solve the basic task of architecture."⁸ For Hansen, the "Great Number" was the problem of an ever-increasing demand for housing, as well as a tendency to provide uniform housing solutions that steamrolled the individuality of each resident enabling. For years, "average" had masqueraded as a solution to social problems; Hansen proposed that the "Great Number" was not just a question of size, but a question of the capacity to accommodate individual identities. By becoming a dynamic rather than a running average, Open Form recognized "concrete people."⁹ Human beings were not

reducible to averages; their equality, at least by the terms of Open Form, was not found in lowest common denominators.

Reconciling the individual with the collective meant transforming the relationship between quality and quantity. The housing crisis, to Hansen, was only a symptom of the fact that Closed Form had “not solved the problem of necessary quantity.”¹⁰ The real problem was that architecture was unable to accommodate variation. “The term ‘quality’ in the language of the Open Form,” Hansen explained, “should be understood as the recognition of the individual in a collective. [...] The new number will produce new quality and conversely the concept of the new quality will help us resolve the number.”¹¹ It was not enough for modern architects to build a sufficient number of dwellings for a rapidly growing global population; they had to engage human life in a new way. In this “swelling society” with its “arsenal of means,” the legibility of the individual was of utilitarian necessity.

The user was the maker of Open Form. At the largest scale of the system, the architect prepared society’s infrastructural mechanism, plotting construction sites and functional zones along a continuum of linear space. At the middle scale, where “objective and subjective elements permeate each other,” the architect began to transfer agency to clients, who could either commission the architect for further services or perform construction themselves. At the smallest, where individuals fashioned their own surroundings, Hansen proposed a “completely new architectural task: a communicative transmission to [architects’] psychology of the organic and bountiful chaos of events in a form [...], not through the elimination of separate forms but by recognizing the separate component elements.”¹² While the units of the whole were subsidiary to the overall form,

users retained agency to move and change within it. Instead of instructing the client's behavior, Open Form refined the thinking of the architect. Felicity Scott has noted, however, that the Open Form's emancipatory possibility was limited, that the very governing structure of an Open Form itself provided the architect, who now coordinated relationships between parts rather than designed their behaviors, with a new type of control over the system.¹³ While the constituents of Open Form might be free to choose their own plot and build their own home, Hansen still managed the body of actions, rationalizing them within the conceptual form he envisioned. As a third party mediating between form and history, the architect retained the power to define opposed elements, to put parts into play with the whole.

The theory that Hansen presented at Otterlo harnessed uncertainty as a generative principle, as an ambiguous starting point whose temporality and potential for variation was a promise of immortality. While the architect remained in charge, defining how actions would be aggregated, individuals themselves lived as they pleased, creating their surroundings as they saw fit. Open Form had political consequences, positioning architects as coordinators of a new, participatory democratic system. It presumed that no society or state was complete without the legibility of each of its citizens, that civic engagement occurred through the action of each individual—not just in the name of a collective.

The Problem of Origins: 1922-1945

A 2004 interview with Hansen revealed the difficulty of defining Open Form's origins. The interviewer, Joanna Mytkowska, was curious about the development of

Hansen's practice as it evolved throughout his life among a variety of experiences and compromising pressures. Her inquiry reflected a desire to capture in Hansen's words how life changes bear on the purity of an idea, how ideals behave when they collide with reality. While self-reflection was certainly a salient topic for Hansen, who was 82 years old, the presumption that his career could be evaluated for its fidelity to an event or experience was incompatible with his personality, and moreover, with Open Form. As a theory in which form is not predefined, Open Form was not retroactively explainable; its formation did not trace to a particular *reason*.

From the beginning, Oskar Hansen was ambiguous. Born in Helsinki in 1922 to a Russian mother and a Norwegian-Polish father, he grew up just outside the Finnish capital and then in Vilnius (at the time, Polish Wilno) when his parents returned to claim a family estate threatened by state expropriation. Because his father Herman Karl, the son of a citrus-selling Norwegian millionaire, died shortly thereafter in 1928, Hansen likely only vaguely remembered him. In addition to the languages he spoke with his family, he grew up in a Polish city and learned French in school. His childhood was multiethnic, multinational, and multilingual.

Spending his teenage years in the turbulent 1930s, Hansen was just seventeen years old when the Nazis and Soviets invaded Poland and his hometown suddenly became Lithuanian. Although in 1939 he and his brother Erik joined the Finnish resistance against the Soviets, they later found themselves fighting in the Polish Home Army against the Germans. After being captured by the Soviets, Hansen spent time in an NKVD prison in Riga, working thereafter as a slave laborer on a Soviet penal farm in rural Latvia. After escaping from the NKVD, he was picked up by the Gestapo,

mistakenly released, and finally reunited with Erik and his other brother Runar before joining the Polish underground.¹⁴

In early 1945 as the war was coming to a close, Hansen's family left what was now Lithuania for Poland. Their Vilnius home, expropriated during the Soviet occupation, would not be returned. Erik went to Kraków to begin studies in painting, Runar to Gdańsk for medical studies, and Hansen's mother Anna and sister Arwid moved to Malbork. In January, Hansen himself moved to Białystok for a temporary job in the new government's human resettlement program, and then in March to Lublin to enroll at Warsaw Polytechnic's temporary branch in that city. By the end of the year, Hansen moved with the school's Faculty of Architecture to Warsaw, the city where he would spend most of the rest of his life. Over the span of those six years, Hansen was uprooted, imprisoned, and beholden to various military loyalties. He fought for one nation and then another, moved from one city to the next. The fact that he began his full-time architectural education at the end of the war seems anticlimactic in comparison to his experiences in the previous six years.

As Poland's Stalinist regime intensified in the fall of 1948, Hansen the college student left Warsaw for Paris on a scholarship. His friend and mentor Jerzy Sołtan, a future colleague at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts in the 1950s and collaborator in the school's Arts and Research Workshops, was connected to Le Corbusier and other French CIAM members and recommended Hansen to Pierre Jeanneret's design studio. In addition to designing aluminum houses and portable pavilions as Jeanneret's intern, Hansen spent time in early 1949 working in the painting studio of Cubist artist Fernand Léger, where he learned about painting and sculpture. His time in Paris was eye-opening

and exciting; he experimented with artistic mediums, learned from different artists, acquired a deep appreciation for Paris. He improved his French, gaining international and interdisciplinary exposure.

As an intern for Jeanneret, Hansen attended the July 1949 meeting of the CIAM in Bergamo, the same event where Helena Syrkus of Chapter Three gave her controversial speech in support of Socialist Realism. As one of the youngest people there, Hansen the 27-year-old exchange student was not particularly bothered by his fellow Pole's iconoclastic speech; he would go on to cause his own stir at Bergamo with an outburst of criticism of Le Corbusier. Apparently annoyed by the French architect's suggestion to "humanize modern architecture" through mass-produced tapestry, Hansen's criticism—accusing Le Corbusier of "going commercial"—created a scene and caught the attention of others. "When I left the stage, a bit dizzy following such a desperate act," Hansen later remembered, "I was approached by [...] Ms. Jacqueline Tyrwhitt [...] one of the organizers of a CIAM summer school that was to take place in early August in London. She invited me to participate."¹⁵ His time in Paris, Bergamo, and London between 1948 and 1950 broadened the scope of his work. In the 1990s he even began, but never finished, a memoir on the experience.¹⁶

After attending the CIAM summer program in England the fall of 1949 and successfully extending his French visa into the next year, in 1950 Hansen returned to Stalinist Poland. He spent the next two years finishing his degree at Warsaw Polytechnic and teaching sculpture and interior design studios at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. He also painted, sculpted, and designed exhibitions—all in the midst of Socialist Realism. In June 1950, he married fellow Polytechnic student Zofia Garlińska, an

architect with whom he frequently collaborated the rest of his career. They remodeled a small apartment on Sędziowska Street near the Polytechnic, starting a family with the birth of a son in May 1951. Although Hansen graduated from the Polytechnic in 1952, he and Zofia called Sędziowska Street home for the next 46 years.

When the Hansens moved into their apartment, they had no idea how much time Oskar would soon be spending there. With a design proposal in 1952, Hansen's fledgling career came very close to being wrecked forever by the mandate of Socialist Realism. In the controversy's fallout, Hansen largely withdrew from public life until 1954, limiting his activities to teaching at the ASPW, designing exhibition pavilions, and painting and sculpting in the privacy of his home. With friend and ASPW colleague Lech Rosiński, Hansen had proposed a temporary Warsaw City Hall for a public competition. The design was to renovate the old Nowy Świat theater near the city center, transforming the building interior into a pedagogical instrument:

We're surrounded by space but we don't understand it, we walk around it, next to it. The Greeks could do this by introducing entasis. We thought we'd find 'the entasis' for these constructions – showing the work of the material through the visuals of the horizontal elements. [...] We thought: let the people that go there at least gain something, let them at least understand how the construction works. In the main hall, there was a lacunar ceiling where we also marked the work of the material, by covering the surface with a polychrome.¹⁷

Amid the opaqueness of the Stalinist regime, Hansen and Rosiński's proposal envisioned a government building whose legibility made it transparent. Discernable by everyday people, this temporary City Hall would be accessible physically and mentally. But the proposal did not align with Socialist Realism and was therefore unacceptable. It garnered the disparagement of Warsaw's architectural mainstream, including Józef Sigalin—chief architect for the City of Warsaw—and Szymon Syrkus—husband of Helena Syrkus and professor at Warsaw Polytechnic. Hansen remembered it as the “Trial Under the Tin

Roof,” expressing how the run-in with Socialist Realism had almost legal consequences. In the 2004 interview, Hansen suggest that his recent time abroad in France and England saddled him with “a baggage of other views,” a burden of association that pervaded his proposal with political suspicion from the start.¹⁸

As discussed in Chapter One, Hansen’s teaching at the ASPW throughout the 1950s opened many opportunities for him. Teaching the Solids and Planes Studio at the ASPW’s Faculty of Sculpture was his only continuous job during the period of professional ostracization that followed his controversial City Hall proposal. Since Hansen worked at the ASPW until his retirement in 1983, teaching was also his most stable source of income. Over the course of his career, most of Hansen’s design proposals remained pedagogical or conceptual; his portfolio of built work was rather small, and of built work that was permanent, even smaller. But in 1952 he was able to obtain another job, one less stringent about compliance with Socialist Realism. Hansen later described the development as a breakthrough in his career:

they were afraid of me, afraid of talking to me. The doors then closed completely, I knew I couldn’t do anything. I barred myself in the studio. Then I found another source of income, a job with the foreign trade chamber. That was a very important experience for me. [...] For exhibitions they hired architects who didn’t fit in with social[ist] realism, though admittedly there were few of them, because the Polish community was generally not very ideological [...]¹⁹

With the institutional resources of the ASPW’s Arts and Research Workshops and commissions from the state Ministry of Culture and Art, the Ministry of Foreign Trade (MHZ), and the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade, Hansen began an alternative career in exhibition pavilion design.

Hansen’s first commissioned exhibition, the traveling 1952 “Folk Art Exhibition” for the MKS, was a collaboration with Jerzy Sołtan. With transformable display elements

and an adaptable structural framework that could be set up anywhere, the Folk Art exhibition's technical prowess and ability to improvise was a formal rebuttal to the "Trial Under the Tin Roof" earlier in the year. In 1953, because of the success of the exhibition, he was asked to help design Polish national pavilions for the Leipzig and Stockholm international trade shows.²⁰ In 1955, following the death of Stalin and an increase in political criticism of the Stalinist regime, Hansen and Sołtan curated the National Exhibition of Folk Art at the recently finished Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw. That same year they helped prepare the city for its 5th World Festival of Youth and Students in August, with Sołtan working on the team design for the new 10th Anniversary Stadium in Praga and Hansen creating a festival poster. Hansen was also, at the time, collaborating with Lech Tomaszewski—the engineer who would design the roof for Sołtan's proposed Brussels Fair Pavilion of 1958—on a Polish pavilion for the Izmir International Trade Fair in Turkey. The spatial form of this PIHZ-commissioned pavilion, nearly defined by its roof, was a series of hyperbolic paraboloid modules arranged to suggest infinite expansion. The temporary structure was not a finite formal solution, but rather the design of a structural unit that could be repeated. It was similar in this regard to Hansen's proposal for a replicable structural module for the Brussels World Fair pavilion in 1958.²¹ Although the Izmir pavilion appeared in a distant land and was only a temporary structure, it placed second in the Polish Committee for Building, Planning, and Architecture's annual awards in 1956.²²

The late 1950s saw an even greater increase in the Polish state's demand for domestic and international exhibitions. For the 1958 Brussels World Fair, Hansen and his wife Zofia led a team from the ASPW to propose another roof-defined structural form.

With Wojciech Fangor and Stanisław Zamecznik, Hansen co-curated the Second National Exhibition of Modern Art in Warsaw's Zachęta Gallery in 1957. He also had his own show that year, exhibiting paintings, photographs of sculptures and pavilions, and other works at Warsaw's Jewish Theater.²³ The origins of Open Form, if discoverable somewhere in the intense life experiences and evolving identities of Hansen in his formative years, stem from a *milieu* rather than a *reason*. From his multinational childhood to his changing allegiances during the Second World War to his alternative career, uncertainty pervaded Hansen's environment from the start.

Open Form In Action: An Iterative Manifesto

Open Form at Otterlo in 1959 was the first of many iterations of Hansen's manifesto. The oppositions and interplays of the theory played out over many years as Open Form was repeatedly rewritten, taught, and designed in space. The idea that multiplicity could exist within a broader formal concept was illustrated as the meanings of Open Form evolved over time. Sometimes, the theory materialized in buildings and objects that physically negotiated change. Written versions of Open Form appeared in various publications and languages, generating their own open-ended form as a text. Changing cultural, political, and pedagogical contexts activated new aspects of Open Form, allowing the disposition of Hansen and his work to mean different things at different times. As time would tell, Otterlo did not fix Open Form as one theoretical position, but as a reference point from which Hansen's work embarked to engage various audiences, site conditions, and program requirements.

As Craig Buckley has written, architectural manifestoes like Hansen's operated in

the twentieth century as both a projection of exigency into the future and an appropriation of the past's supposed claims that are carried forward in order to evaluate itself. The manifesto produced, in this way, what Buckley calls "a special type of relay" linking the ideas and experiences of its writer to an imagined future.²⁴ Hansen's engagement with history, by iteratively writing his manifesto and continuously rethinking its origins, demonstrated this relay as an extended process, an aggregation of claims whose particular expressions generated Open Form over time. Open Form became a genealogy, in the way that Foucault described in his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History:" "[genealogy's] duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form to all its vicissitudes." Instead, genealogy maintained "passing events in their proper dispersion."²⁵ Hansen's theory was a long-term project, not a concept to be fully grasped in a moment. Each manifestation, whether in text, in space, or in action, was a rehearsal.

One of the accompanying projects by Hansen at Otterlo was his 1958 proposal for an expansion and renovation of the Zachęta Art Gallery in Warsaw. He conceived the project as an armature for infinite adaptation of the building within it—a version of Open Form that accommodated potential while reckoning with fact. The proposed addition to the Zachęta spoke a familiar language of construction, a Warsaw phenomenon in which construction scaffolding and other gestures of incompleteness made ambiguous promises about the future. Attached to the existing neo-Renaissance Zachęta building that had survived the war, Hansen's proposed addition floated above the ground on four concrete piers. Its double façade appeared to be perpetually unfinished, with operable panels scattered throughout the scaffolding framework and the translucent exterior revealing a

network of bridges and platforms spanning the inside. From above, the project model exposed the interior to be an atrium with unfixed spanning elements, adaptable to any exhibition or event that the gallery would accommodate.

The project was a “literal rendering of physical and programmatic adaptability,” and Hansen himself would later critique its “imitative” nature.²⁶ By materializing in a spatial object the optimism of an eternal Zachęta, by preserving the longevity of a storied Warsaw institution that had famously survived the war, Hansen’s proposal depicted immortality that extended forward and backward in time. Since “art is unpredictable in its development,” as Hansen explained, the Zachęta moved towards “that unknown” by not only exhibiting, but also “encouraging and provoking its birth.”²⁷

Reworking the written version of Open Form allowed Hansen to imagine as well as discover potential meanings of the theory. As he said at Otterlo, “problems will arise and grow gradually [and] “answers will evolve organically.”²⁸ In Hansen’s second presentation of Open Form in July 1960 to the architects from the CIAM, many of whom were now members of the movement known as Team 10, the theory acquired a critique of “cosmopolitanism.”²⁹ While Hansen’s own past work in traveling exhibition pavilions and other ephemeral forms of architecture had its own cosmopolitanism, and while he presented the manifesto in Bagnols-sur-Cèze, France and published it both in Polish in the architecture journal *Struktury* in December and in French in the French-Finnish magazine *Le Carre Bleu* in early 1961, the new critique of cosmopolitanism defined an Open Form regionalism. In addition to this newly adapted disdain for abstraction and rootlessness, the Polish and French publications of the text exposed a question of politics in Open Form that had yet to explicitly appear.

In the *Struktury* and *Le Carre Bleu* texts, the importance of context in eliciting particular manifestations of Open Form became tied to place. The visual context of publication spreads as an assembly of words and images mediated this point. Whereas Hansen's Otterlo manifesto had called for form-making to be contextually appropriate, here the actual process of making the form was rooted in local conditions and vernacular practices. In the *Le Carre Bleu* version, which circulated Open Form through an international French-speaking readership, the text ran above a montage of images that juxtaposed anonymity to specificity. On the left side of the first spread, a formless crowd and a rock suggested sameness and fixity. On the right, a small sampling of photographs of Hansen's projects—including photos from his 1957 self-exhibition at Warsaw's Jewish Theater called the "Choke Chain" and an iteration of one of his sculpture studio's "active interiors"—demonstrated the opposite: dynamism, movement, and participation. The active interior operated like the sculptural equivalent to a solid-void diagram; it demonstrated in physical form the dynamic existence of life within a spatial volume. In this way, its future shape was user-driven; the empathy of the designer was its methodology. It contextualized the discrete actions of those who occupied it by cementing a record, standing in contrast to the impenetrable, one-size-fits-all effect of the stone and the faceless crowd.

The French text had the centrifugal effect of broadcasting Open Form to other cultural and linguistic contexts, broadcasting it within a broader European conversation about the importance of place in architecture. The *Struktury* text did the opposite, creating a centripetal effect by critiquing cosmopolitanism from geographical perspective. Presented in a newspaper-format publication, Hansen's *Struktury* article

deployed the trope of Western imperialism as the source of cosmopolitanism. Being a close translation of the French text that would be published in *Le Carre Bleu* just months later, the Polish version was distinct in leveraging the geopolitical connotations of images. The Brazilian modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer, represented by his Palácio do Planalto model for the Brazilian presidency and a proposed chapel design elsewhere in Brasília, was criticized along with the entire 1957 Interbau building competition in West Berlin in which he famously participated. These projects, to Hansen, were out-of-place and thus anachronistic. Modernist architects like Niemeyer, roaming around the world and marking their idiosyncrasies in various landscapes, produced a placeless and universal landscape that lacked true local engagement. The austere grayscale images situated within the dense lines of text conveyed that even Niemeyer's own communist self-identification did not prevent criticism. As the *Struktury* text explained, each project in this standard international approach to architecture was “antique before it is built.”³⁰

Hansen published a version of Open Form in *Polish Cultural Review* (Przegląd Kulturalny) in 1959. In this version of the manifesto, he confronted the “monumentality” of modern architectural form, referring to buildings that were not “ready to absorb the changes and events taking place during the lifetime of the form” as “personal monuments to their authors.”³¹ Again indicting the Closed Form practices of Niemeyer, Hansen foreshadowed his *Structures* article later that year by referring to the housing blocks at Berlin's 1957 Interbau competition: “somebody else's souvenirs, feelings, somebody else's houses and housing settlements.”³² For him, the “impervious” buildings and “once-for-all” solutions of modern architecture were alienating. “We will walk through [...], not around” the Open Form; “diverse individuality, in all its randomness and bustling, will

become the wealth of this space, its participant.”

The importance of place in the *Polish Cultural Review*, *Struktury*, *Le Carre Bleu* texts linked Open Form’s evolution to Hansen’s work in the early 1960s at the Juliusz Słowacki Housing Estate in the city of Lublin. In this project, initially begun in 1961 and requiring Hansen’s engagement all the way until 1971, questions of spectatorship and publicity in residential architecture came together in a sustained formal debate on place. Hansen had begun exploring the notion of a “Linear Continuous System” (LCS), an urban vision of Open Form that was not a city, but a continuum of functionally-defined zones enabling residents to appropriate and use space as they pleased. The LCS was to operate as an “absorptive background” upon which domestic and public realms coexisted and interacted across spatial and functional vectors. The Słowacki Estate attempted to realize the possibilities of the LCS in a practical way, enabling performance in a field of play to negotiate personal with social life.

The blocks of housing of the final version of the estate, arranged in loose wave-like agglomerations of apartments, were the background of a stage-like public space. Raised platforms rendered everyday acts like sitting and conversing as spectacular exercises: “the place’s spectacular situation and the architecture’s screen-like organization create a BACKGROUND against which the everyday events assume theatrical proportions,” as Hansen later reflected.³³ The “background” was both the housing blocks that framed the public space and the surrounding city beyond. Positioned on the crest of a hill overlooking the rest of Lublin, this “Theater of Open Form,” as Hansen called it, enabled residents to visually orient themselves to their location in the city and for residents looking out from their apartment balconies to get a sense of the

activity in the public space. As a viewing platform, the Theater was a learning tool; as a social condenser, it was a site for spontaneous interactions and simultaneity. On one hand, it provided a space for introspection and knowledge-creation; on the other, it interposed the social acts of seeing and being seen. The project reframed social space as an environment—albeit a built one—where performance was indistinguishable from casual interaction, where spectatorship augmented everyday acts into significant events.

Presenting Open Form as a pedagogical system related Hansen's projects and proposals to his own teaching practices at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. When he published an article on his theory in the Swiss design magazine *Werk* in 1971, he made this aspect explicit. Where Open Form had engaged the pedagogical act of viewing to define place at Lublin's Słowacki Estate, here the theory evolved into a feedback loop of teaching, learning, and assessment. In *Werk*, Hansen made the bold claim that Open Form “stemmed” from the Situationist movement. Like Situationism, which tried to glean knowledge from unguided spatial actions by starting with specific criteria and allowing the experience to unfold with time, Open Form was an endeavor into knowledge instead of comprehensive formation of it. Pedagogy, in this way, would involve the teacher as the initiator of a learning process, not a dictator of an outcome. While it is not clear how much contact Hansen had with the Situationists, Open Form's original presentation at Otterlo in 1959 places it directly within that cultural and political epoch. Furthermore Hansen, a fluent French speaker, had access to Situationist currents in art theory.

On a basic level, Open Form resonated with Situationist concepts like *dérive* and *détournement*. In the 1971 article, Hansen made clear that Open Form's synthesis between objective and subjective did not produce an architecture of “anarchy.” Its

pedagogy, instead, maintained “an entirely conscious control of the processes involved.”³⁴ Like Debord’s *dérive*, in which “letting-go and its necessary contradiction” bookended a system of learning that was both open-ended and comprehensible, Open Form as pedagogy aimed to reconcile the uncontrollable tangents of spatial experience by finishing lessons with retrospective analysis.

Hansen’s vision of an Open Form aesthetics intersected with the Situationist practice of *détournement*, which had been defined as the “integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu.”³⁵ At Otterlo in 1959, Hansen had called for the incorporation of “ordinary, mundane, things found, broken, accidental” into the form.³⁶ Invoking French art theorist Pierre Restany, who founded *Nouveau réalisme* the following year, Hansen positioned his theory as a practice of everyday living. Interest in the quotidian was not uncommon at Otterlo. Alison and Peter Smithson, notably, had long appropriated images from popular culture into their renderings and ideas. The couple’s “But Today We Collect Ads” article from 1956 had elevated advertising and propaganda art as practices from which architecture should learn. Hansen’s interest in detourning everyday images and objects, as well as the premise of Open Form’s reimagined architect-client relationship, shared the Smithsons’ sentiment that the “artist is often unaware that his patron [...] is living in a different visual world from his own.”³⁷ Furthermore, as Hansen said, Open Form made the individual “indispensable in the creation of his own surroundings;” inhabitants curated their own surroundings.³⁸

Open Form As Action: Exhibition, Performance, Pedagogy

The evolution of Open Form as a text and a series of spatial projects was the actualization of its declared content. In this way, each iteration did not delegitimize its predecessors, but remade Open Form as developing concept, forever in-process. After Otterlo, Hansen engaged changing circumstances as opportunities to invent new applications of his thinking, to pose new questions to various audiences. When the 1971 *Werk* article concluded, it described the act of teaching as the form itself, confirming a pedagogical trend that had been taking shape in his practice for two decades. “It should be made possible to transmit knowledge,” Hansen explained, “based not on static realities but on the reality of those aspects that can be developed.”³⁹

Throughout his long teaching career at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, Hansen’s teaching and work evolved with changes in the didactic practices, technology, and artistic media available to him. What is unclear is whether Hansen’s interdisciplinary teaching style helped to reform the ASPW throughout the 1950s, or whether the institution itself, with its government commissioned ZAB, changed him. Hired part-time in 1950 to work as Jerzy Sołtan’s teaching assistant, in 1952 he began teaching the Solids and Planes Studio for the Faculty of Sculpture. With this professional promotion occurring immediately following his controversial “Trial Under a Tin Roof” exchange with Józef Sigalin and Szymon Syrkus, it became clear already in 1952 that Hansen would have a traditional architecture career, and that the ASPW would be an important environment for him.

The Solids and Planes Studio, which he later renamed the Visual Structures studio, emphasized “visual action,” “sequencing,” and the inversion of space and object

as modes of formal exploration. The course was where Hansen developed his idea for the “active interior,” a sculptural exercise whose objective, according to the course syllabus, was to “turn [...] the formation of architectural space [...] into an emotional sculptural study.”⁴⁰ Essentially a solid-void study that materialized action by sculpting the range of space needed by a volume’s inhabitants, the active negative inverted interiority into a physical shape. Such sculptures appeared frequently in exhibitions by Hansen and by his students; in addition to featuring them at many shows at the ASPW, Hansen presented an active interior of his own home on Sędziowska Street when he curated his own exhibition at the Jewish Theater in 1957.

In increasing frequency during the 1960s, Hansen’s Visual Structures Studio traveled out of Warsaw to sites in the countryside. Archived photographs show Hansen and his students in open fields and forest clearings, experimenting with materials like string to create large group forms. In one photograph, they walk with outreached arms through the forest in a single file human chain, producing the shape of a snaking contour. In another, they reassemble in an arching formation, making a tunnel through which other students ascend a lake embankment. In still another, their human chain creates a boundary around a circular zone in the forest clearing. In many of these situations, the only strictures that Hansen supplied were “given” conditions and “required” agendas, stipulations to anchor the unfolding activities of the group to a set of behavioral criteria. Beyond those reference points, the studio’s group form was expected to evolve and change; its final shape and outcome were expected to be a surprise.

The relationship between Hansen’s pedagogical practices at the ASPW and his interest in human behavior was especially strong in his exhibition designs in 1958 and

1959, leading up to his presentation Open Form at Otterlo in September. In 1958, a year before Otterlo, Hansen and his wife Zofia proposed a pavilion for Warsaw's Contemporary Music Festival. Called the "My Place, My Music" pavilion, the Hansens' formulated a structure that "pictured the spatiality of music." This endeavor to visualize the invisible served to give the pavilion's occupants freedom to define their own paths below and within a tensile fabric structure. Stretched between upright rods, the roof form kept from interfering in occupants' movement, dedicating that role to the sound being emitted from nearby musical instruments. The influence of rhythm and cadence on occupants gave the musician, not the designer of the pavilion, the agency to intervene in human behavior. Envisioning sound as a spatial form, or least as a force with which space must contend, Hansen repositioned the role of the architect. Seeming to build upon his argument at Otterlo and his notion that the "architect-superspecialist is obsolescent in present times,"⁴¹ the pavilion, although never built, suggested a mode of moving through space that responded to active rather than stationary obstacles.

In the summer just before he went to Otterlo, Hansen, his wife Zofia, and Lech Tomaszewski were commissioned by the PIHZ to design a pavilion called "the Fan" for the 1959 São Paulo Biennale of Art in Brazil. Showcasing Polish tractors and other farming equipment in order to positively portray the nation's industrial capabilities, the pavilion had the additional agenda of questioning how nature-derived roof forms could influence movement within a space. Like the music pavilion from a year earlier, the São Paulo emphasized the *action* rather than the *static* purpose or meaning of the form. Conceived by Hansen as a "transformable, module-less structure made of canvas and steel, adaptable to various land forms, flexible and yielding to gusts of wind," the

pavilion was a prime example of Hansen's interest in what he called "biotechnics." As a framework in which natural forms became metaphors for design partis, the premise of biotechnics was to discover design potentials that existed outside the architect's own mental creation. The biotechnics of wind would unburden the pavilion's visitors from an architect-defined circulation diagram, allowing the pavilion and occupants to "breathe," as Hansen put it. Located in Ibirapuera Park, the structure stretched between outward-pointed metal stakes in a tent-like configuration. Thin metal cables regulated the edges of the plastic-fabric roof, giving it the appearance of floating above the ground between invisible vectors.

Hansen was intrigued by wind as a formal metaphor and structural force that could decenter the architecture from the implementation of spatial experience. The pavilion "resembled a butterfly next to Oscar Niemeyer's nearby huge 'marquise,'" Hansen said, "being sunk- and rain-proof" and able to "let out excess wind" as it "made viewers aware of the invisible gusts" of wind.⁴² In this way, Hansen's São Paulo pavilion was both an image of the tectonics of wind loads and an active technological experiment with them. Instead of defining a naturalistic world within an architectural space, the pavilion vibrated and swayed within it, revealed site conditions for what they were: an urban park in a windy valley. Lightly engaging the grassy surface of the ground and generating a live, kinetic form derived from and responding to natural processes, Hansen reinforced his disdain for Niemeyer's work by juxtaposing the pavilion to the Brazilian architect's nearby Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion, the "marquise." Two definitions of "the natural" emerged: the local Niemeyer's expensive platform that meandered through the park, evoking forms like rivers and the prone female body in its amorphous shape, and

the Polish visitor Hansen's biotechnic tent, temporarily landing on a nearby spot and leveraging the wind itself as a metaphor and an actual structural component.

Hansen joined the Group for the Study of Mobile Architecture (GEAM) in 1958, led by Hungarian architect Yona Friedman. Friedman's "Program of Mobile Urbanism," written in 1957, resonated with Hansen's exhibition work as well as with the presentation of Open Form at Otterlo in 1959. Instead of imagining a world in which constructed objects were physically mobile, Friedman had envisioned mobility as the "perpetual transformation" of urban space, describing human shelters that would "touch a minimum surface of the ground" and "be [...] movable," structures that would "rest on very elongated pilotis" and "be composed of a continuous three-dimensional framework," and "cheaper elements, simple to assemble and to demount, easy to transport (in terms of weight and bulk), and ready to be reutilized."⁴³ Hansen's Warsaw Music and São Paulo pavilions, the first proposed and the second realized, each floated above the ground while deploying lightweight, inexpensive building materials like fabric and cable steel. They resisted gravity in a similar way to how Hansen had proposed the scaffolding clad Zachęta Gallery extension: an orthogonal network of structural vectors that enabled the suspension of temporary feature elements and occupiable platforms. Also in 1958, Hansen had proposed a gridded structural matrix for the Jose Batlle y Ordóñez monument in Uruguay, in which the structural framework sat at the top of a hill and suspended a variety of the Uruguayan artist's sculptures. The project provided a replicable system of hanging and displaying that Hansen described as "monumental transformable space," capable of elevating "man's creative powers."⁴⁴ Hansen's pavilions, at home and abroad, operated as pedagogical instruments for the display of other objects and the experience of

other concepts, rather than monuments to the ability or ingenuity of the author himself.

In 1975, Hansen wrote a short text entitled “To Break Down the Barrier Between the Audience and the Actor,” reflecting on his recent proposal to renovate a theater inside the Palace of Culture and Science. Here, Open Form would not just enable a “chaos of events;” it would participate in those very events, teaching a social order that lacked hierarchy and that fluctuated physically. “The term Open Form,” as he now explained, “comes from the fact that the form awaits action on the part of the occupant; it is set up to be developed.”⁴⁵ The array of lighting and effects equipment inside the theater would operate its own spectacle, assuming the dispositions of the theatrical performances. Sophisticated service elements and technologies—electronic speakers, a curtain system, retractable control rods, and other equipment—were suspended above the floor by a gigantic gantry system. The theater would “serve the individual parts of the action like a series of frames and at the same time be adaptable during the performance.” The theater space was conceived as an assemblage of moving parts, not a defined shape. Even though it sat within a wing of the highly monumental, ornamental Palace of Culture and Science, Hansen’s new Studio Theater would be defined by the performances it hosted, shaped by the “needs of the dramaturgy and the reactions of the participants as they evolve during the performance.”⁴⁶ In this way, without a predetermined arrangement, the theater could never fall out of sync with its program; it unfolded in-time as the drama progressed.

As opposed to the “dead end” approach of traditional theater, in which the audience faced the stage to consume the meaning of the display, in Hansen’s conception there would be “one simple space,” one open field of possibilities in which countless pieces of equipment, moving elements, and bodies could interact and recalibrate spatial

relationships. Whereas in traditional theater the actor would “shout from the stage,” the Studio Theater’s adjustable seating platforms and removable seats—attached with pegs to the floor and able to swivel—would “join the audience and actor” on a level playing field. The proposal’s debt to the Open and Closed binary of Open Form was clear: a single, adaptable membrane of open space juxtaposed the “status quo” of a perpendicular, raked series of seating terraces. As Hansen continued, “the action can be conducted not only [in] the width and length of the hall, using the planes of the floor and the walls, but also in the free space of the theater above the floor and between the walls.” This feat would be accomplished through the gantry crane and with a series of adjustable pedestrian bridges that spanned the space near the ceiling and ran along exterior walls. No part of the interior was off-limits; the performance space was three-dimensional, rather than flat.

For Hansen, the Studio Theater was an opportunity to put Open Form pedagogy into conversation with architectural space. Like the Theater of Open Form at the Słowacki Estate in Lublin, “seeing” and “being seen” were interchangeable as audience members and actors were shifted throughout the room. As with Hansen’s Warsaw Music and São Paulo pavilions, the action taking place inside the structure defined—for the duration of its motion—the form that the space took. The design of the Studio Theater was for a system, not a shape; it engaged the building as a disposition whose manifestation would evolve at the will of its inhabitants. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Jacques Rancière described an equality of knowledge that “destroys all of the hierarchies of representation.”⁴⁷ In “a community of readers [...] without legitimacy,” the “random circulation of the written word” would result in a field of communication without fixed

speakers and listeners. At the Studio Theater, Hansen aspired to such a politics. As Hansen wrote, “since communication is diverse in character, the dramatic ‘channels’ that join the audience and the actors must be adapted to the given situation.”⁴⁸ For Hansen, creating a theater of nonlinear communication, without a hierarchy of knowledge distinguishing audience from actor, meant a form without shape, a shifting terrain of humans and performance equipment.

Hansen explained his pedagogy best when in 1981, just two years before retirement, he made an ideogram comparing the Closed and Open didactic process. With the Solidarity movement on the rise and widespread political dissidence taking place throughout Poland that year, Hansen attempted to reform the ASPW’s Faculty of Sculpture where he been teaching for decades. On the left side of the diagram sat the Closed system, where information moved unidirectionally from a definitive source, through the given teaching program to the student, and finally to an “evaluation” terminus where students could be tested. On the right was the Open system, where pedagogy happened on a spectrum between the teacher and the student, moving in both directions and meandering between teaching programs. The vector of knowledge did not have a clear destination; it overlapped itself and other vectors of information. Hansen’s attempt to reform the program fell flat, with him leaving the Sculpture faculty in March to start his own short-lived “Faculty of Integrated Fine Arts” program where he could implement this new iteration of Open Form pedagogy in peace. Later that year, in December, Solidarity, too, fell flat; the government crushed the dissident movement by enacting Martial law until July 1983.

Open Monument: A Proposal for Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1958

Like his rejection from the Warsaw City Hall competition in 1952 and his failed reform to the ASPW Faculty of Sculpture in 1981, Hansen learned at various moments throughout his career that Open Form had its limitations. One particularly poignant moment came in June 1957, as he, his wife Zofia, and a small team of ASPW faculty and students began creating a monument proposal for the International Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Competition on the site of the Nazi extermination camp near Oświęcim, Poland. The project's eventual failure proved that although Open Form's pride was the ostensible neutrality of its subjective engagement and unpredictability, certain histories were not open-ended; there were spaces and sites where neutrality was not an option.

Hannah Arendt's 1963 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* followed one of the most visible and high-stakes war crimes trials to occur in the aftermath of the Holocaust and Second World War. Focusing on the moral culpability of Adolf Eichmann, one of the leading Nazi administrators in charge of planning the Final Solution and the Nazi extermination camps, Arendt followed the Israeli High Court proceedings of his case in 1960 and 1961. Quoting from the lead Israeli prosecutor in the case, Gideon Hausner, Arendt laid out the stakes of the crime and the trial:

...in such an enormous and complicated crime as the one we are now considering, [...] there is not much point in using the ordinary concepts of counseling and soliciting to commit a crime. For these crimes were committed en masse, not only in regard to the number of victims, but also in regard to the numbers of those who perpetrated the crime, and the extent to which any one of the many criminals was close to or remote from the actual killer of the victim means nothing, as far as the measure of his responsibility is concerned. On the contrary, in general *the degree of responsibility increases as we draw further away from the man who uses the fatal instrument with his own hands.*⁴⁹

For Arendt, Eichmann personified the “banality of evil,” a paradox in which guilt could be circumstantial, dangerous anti-Semitism could stem from apathy, and egregious

crimes could result from moral ambivalence. Considering the juxtaposition of his almost ordinary appearance and unintimidating demeanor with the gruesomeness of the crimes with which he was responsible, Eichmann's case brought to light the moral calamity of the Final Solution. While his bureaucratic position kept him physically distant from the killing, Eichmann's crime was nevertheless real, and dispersed in countless spaces: public railroads converted to deportation routes, town squares transformed into human concentration centers, farmlands turned into killing fields. Just as his actions were just one aspect of the larger collective crime in which he was complicit, the crime of the Final Solution was not confinable to one person, place, or event.

Understanding the Holocaust as crime of infinite proportions informed the way Hansen and his team engaged the site of Auschwitz, the global symbol of the Holocaust. As he later wrote, "for some time after deciding to take part in this competition we felt helpless. No gesture, no form of expression, no color could, in our eyes, express, commemorate, or celebrate what happened in this place."⁵⁰ The Eichmann trial's seemingly impossible attempt to adjudicate the crime of the Holocaust was akin to Hansen's proposal, which in the end attempted to contend with the unspeakable by decentering the emotional significance from a particular space within the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp—the crematorium precinct—to the entire site itself.

There were a set of basic requirements for the design competition, ranging from occupying a large, flat area of the camp to giving special attention to the crematorium precinct at the terminus of the camp's railroad spur.⁵¹ A critical point stipulated in the requirements reflected the fact that camp remained in Poland, and that common Polish narratives absorbed the specifically Jewish tragedy of the Holocaust into a larger story of

national loss. The monument's content was to be "typical for the whole issue, and therefore [...] not limited to presenting in artistic forms the fate of only one of the groups of Auschwitz victims."⁵² While this plan for a universal monument would seem amenable to Open Form's desire for heterogeneity, this attempt at neutrality combined with Hansen's open-ended approach to the site would ultimately confront the specificities of Auschwitz-Birkenau as memory and trauma. Hansen's resistance to the competition requirement to conceptually center the monument on the crematorium precinct—most apparent in his team's second, unsolicited iteration of the proposal—would prove to be another factor in the project's failure.

The Hansen team's proposal, as mentioned, had two iterations. In the first, submitted in March 1958, the team stayed true to the project requirements, envisioning a platform that would encompass the entire crematorium precinct. Instead of creating a vertical marker or symbolic object in the landscape, as was conventional practice, the platform would "petrify the camp soil in the shape of [a] low, massive slab," supporting the gathering of visitors in this most emotionally sensitive zone of the camp.⁵³ Fittingly named "the Slab" by the team, it constituted its own microsite within the larger complex, reinforcing the particular egregiousness of the gas chambers amid the rest of the camp's facilities. The slab's creation was to be facilitated through "electropetrification:" a process of combining water, cement, and calcium with the existing soil and delivering a series of electric shocks to fossilize the ground.⁵⁴ The team's strategy emphasized proximity as an emotional experience, leveraging the very spatial hierarchy and movement sequence that the Nazis had already established. The crematorium precinct had been, for Auschwitz's inmates, a final destination, a culmination of suffering that was

otherwise scattered throughout railroad cars, loading platforms, hiding spaces, and urban ghettos across Europe. Here, fifteen years later in the People's Republic of Poland, the Slab would function as the commemorative center of this suffering's ensuing trauma and memory, accessible to visitors from near and afar, people from all walks of life and religion.

In the center of the slab would be an occupiable, crescendo-shaped pit to metaphorically house the "ashes from the camps of the world."⁵⁵ Surrounding it, the outlines of the former crematorium buildings would be inscribed as shallow linear trenches, etching into the earth a physical reminder of the past. This museal version of Auschwitz would simulate direct contact with the events and remains of the Holocaust, instrumentalize vicariousness as a medium for empathy. Being *close* to the most extreme crimes, as the proposal suggested, made their significance more real. As Hansen would write in his critique of monumentality in 1959, visitors would "walk through it, and not around it."⁵⁶

But this first iteration of the proposal, even after the competition jury announced in May that it was one of the seven finalists, was becoming "increasingly alien" to Hansen's team. As he explained it, "did we want to commemorate a crime, or preserve evidence of it?"⁵⁷ The second iteration of the team's proposal, when the Slab became "the Road," marked a spatial transition away from the crematorium precinct and a conceptual transformation of the team's view of the broader Auschwitz-Birkenau site. The electropetrified slab extended in a northeast-southwest direction from a point near the camp's northwest corner through the crematorium precinct and the boundary behind it, becoming a diagonal line across the camp that intersected various building foundations

and remains at an oblique angle. Just as Arendt identified the Final Solution as a diffuse crime, the second stage of Hansen's monument proposal identified the site itself as the monument, not a setting in which an object or space became the focus.

"To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," Theodor Adorno once wrote.⁵⁸ The statement implied that to articulate meaning in the aftermath of the Holocaust meant to commit the violence of imagining a world that had not already been hopelessly shattered. For Hansen, to create a figural monument to the victims of the Holocaust or to invest the physical site with a particular significance meant to convert Auschwitz *into* poetry. To maintain Open Form's morally neutral position of accommodating individuation within a cohesive image of society, the monument for Auschwitz had to avoid such an indulgence. The solution, therefore, was to implement the Road as an "anti-monument:" to approach the commemorative process on a forensic rather than figural level. In the book *Mengele's Skull*, Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman explore the forensic process that identified the remains of Auschwitz doctor Josef Mengele.⁵⁹ Whereas the highly politicized Eichmann trial of the early 1960s had privileged subjectivity over objectivity, treating firsthand survivor accounts as evidence and breaking the precedent set by the Nuremberg Trials of relying almost solely on paper documentation, the forensic "trial" to identify Mengele's remains returned to the object: the skull of the accused. In a similar way, the second iteration of the team's Auschwitz proposal "returned" to the site itself, exposing Auschwitz as evidence of crime instead of inventing or guiding visitors toward a particular interpretation of meaning. As opposed to the Slab, which had marked the crematorium precinct as an inflection point in the commemorative sequence, the Road engaged the entire tragedy of Auschwitz: fences, barracks, latrines, and other

outbuildings, all sites where horrible abuses and dehumanizing actions had taken place. There would be “no single place of homage—the entire camp is a scene of tragic experience,” as Hansen said. “Flowers would be placed “everywhere, on the barbed wire fences, on the ruined barracks, and on the stairs leading into the crematorium chambers.”⁶⁰ The project was no longer an intervention at a defined site, marking one subsection of the site as more significant than another. The Road encountered the crematoria as the penultimate point in a longer journey, guiding visitors through the remains of the site before emptying them into the forest west of Auschwitz-Birkenau: “towards life.”

Preserving the evidence as opposed to commemorating the events meant encountering Auschwitz in a new way. The diagonal gesture across the site, confronting pedestrians with the physical evidence of the previous inhabitants was the team’s way of “framing in stone” what had happened, instead of telling a new story about it. The entrance to Auschwitz had to be different too. The diagonal route meant moving the entry point significantly to the north of the original, abandoning the gate at the railroad spur and upsetting the industrial logic of a perpendicular approach. In this way, the Road would not reproduce for visitors the arrival experience of the camp’s former inmates; encountering Auschwitz-Birkenau would not be a vicarious experience. As one scholar has put it, “no one was to ever pass through that gate again.”⁶¹

For Walter Benjamin, the act of reproduction detaches the produced object from its parent, negating the aura of its uniqueness.⁶² But in the case of the Hansen team’s transition to the second iteration of the Auschwitz-Birkenau proposal, reproducing the experience of camp was akin to creating an aura. As a pathway rather than a space of

commemoration, the Road avoided the poetry of a figural monument and the Slab's monumental space of proximity. Where the first iteration of the proposal had fallen short by materializing the crime of the Holocaust in the symbol of the crematoria, the second iteration usurped static space with the mobile visitor, allowing site experience to become a process of interpretation. Experiencing the site forensically, visitors interacted with discrete elements—proof of crimes rather than symbols of them.

The Road positioned Auschwitz-Birkenau within a cosmic, rather than a human, temporality. Since the extended surface through the camp and its remnants fossilized a cross-section of Auschwitz, the rest of the site could change with the creeping undergrowth of the surrounding forest. The future of the camp, as renderings showed, was a pathway through a forest. The ground on either side of the Road would be left to erode, weather, be overtaken by vegetation. Only the preserved strip of the visitors' route, coursing straight through, would inscribe the evidence of what had happened there. Leveraging an instrumentality of nature rather than the industrial instrumentality that the Nazis had employed in Auschwitz's original inception, Hansen's team allowed the site to speak without symbolic meaning, exist through time without a prescribed notion of spiritual or metaphysical transcendence.

The events surrounding the proposal's failure to launch culminated in Rome in May 1959, when the competition committee asked Hansen and his team to modify their design with some sort of figural, representative object. The Poles would collaborate with two Italian teams, generating a diplomatic, cooperative solution. Hansen's team scoffed at the request, leaving Rome "in protest" as they saw their proposal crumble into concession and compromise.⁶³ But the reasons for the change in the competition were more complex

than the jury's politics or infatuation with figural monuments. For perhaps the very reason that Hansen's team proposed their Open Form alternative, the project was unacceptable; it "failed to take into account that there were survivors."⁶⁴ As one such individual, a Pole, recounted:

The work of the Hansens may hurt the feelings of the survivors of Auschwitz. Why? The assumption is too theoretical. We cross out fascism, the authors seem to say. We put a thick black diagonal line. No more Auschwitz! It's an excellent idea for a poster, illustration, or a book-cover. But when this vision is realized, when transferred to the vast territory of the camp as a wide road, when covered with snow, or, during the mass pilgrimages of thousands, when soiled with the Auschwitz mould, with clay, the road might entirely lose its expression.⁶⁵

Without a discernable meaning, or at least a defined space in which the traumas of the past could be expressed and articulated, the Auschwitz-Birkenau of the future was simply a forest with a road down its middle, an open-ended, shapeless form forever consumed by its present. Regarding Auschwitz as evidence rather than symbol, the Hansen team denied survivors the ability to express what Auschwitz meant to them. Survivors felt "they had been omitted from the design, [...] that there was no place for them [...] They would have been locked out from their experience, or locked in forever."⁶⁶ By opening Auschwitz, Open Form threatened to close it.

The paradox of Open Form, revealed in the extreme by the fate of the Auschwitz-Birkenau proposal, was that ambivalence to the ultimate form and shape of architecture does not render the architect as a neutral actor. Withholding a prescribed shape by leaving it to will and agency of future occupants and visitors neither excused Open Form architects from the task of making decisions nor created parity, as Hansen had imagined it, between the knowledges of the expert and amateur. Subjective engagement with sites and histories had its limitations, particularly in the charged physical and political spaces of postwar, post-Holocaust Poland. But for Hansen, Open Form's uncertainty allowed a

human-centered architecture to gradually emerge: “Taking into consideration the constantly broadening analysis of component elements, their mutual permeation as well as the indivisible structure of society, we approach the idea of a complete, universal, whole, continuous space—space of [...] a different and new morality.”⁶⁷

Far from ever being neutral, Open Form envisioned a moral role for architecture in society. Like each of the characters in this thesis, Oskar Hansen’s story and work were connected in ways far deeper than mere coincidence or evolution. As the development of the theory and Hansen’s own life story demonstrate, Open Form was neither born from an event nor traceable to an origin; it was instead a collection—a document—of Hansen’s experiences over time, iterated through architectural programs, site conditions, pedagogical practices, and the Open Form manifesto’s many audiences. It was truly an architecture of and in action. It is impossible to disentangle Open Form’s continuously unsettled status as a theory and a text from the twists and turns of Hansen’s life experiences. The theory was ambiguous from its inception, as Hansen’s 2004 interview demonstrated. But then again, so was Hansen, the polyglot, multinational Pole, and interdisciplinary artist. Open Form ultimately attempted to harness the generative power of uncertainty to reconcile form with history. Granting a new type of agency to its constituents, its propensity to evolve with time reflected, managed, and derived from the people it served, even—as the Auschwitz-Birkenau proposal proved—to the point of alienating them.

- ¹ Oskar Hansen, "The Open Form in Architecture—The Art of the Great Number" in *New Frontiers*, 190.
- ² The other was Jerzy Sołtan.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Algirdas J. Greimas, "The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints," *On Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 48-62.
- ⁵ Hansen, "Open Form," *New Frontiers*, 190.
- ⁶ Ibid, 196.
- ⁷ Hansen, "Open Form," *New Frontiers*, 190.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid., 191.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 190.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid., 191.
- ¹³ Felicity Scott, "Space Educates," *Oskar Hansen – Opening Modernism: On Open Form Architecture, Art, and Didactics*. eds. Aleksandra Kedziorek and Łukasz Ronduda. (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art Warsaw, 2014), 143.
- ¹⁴ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 170-173.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 174.
- ¹⁶ See Oskar Hansen, *Paris. Bergamo. London (1948-1950)*, typescript for publication, 1999. In Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 172.
- ¹⁷ Oskar Hansen interview with Joanna Mytkowska, 2004. In Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 14.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ On the Stockholm Pavilion, his co-authors were brothers Stanisław and Wojciech Zamecznik, who had curated the Warsaw Accuses exhibition at the Polish National Museum from May 1945 to January 1946. See Chapter 1 and Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 180-181.
- ²¹ See Chapter 1.
- ²² Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 182-184.
- ²³ Ibid., 186-189
- ²⁴ Craig Buckley, *After the Manifesto: Writing, Architecture, and Media in a New Century* (New York: GSAPP Books/T6 Ediciones, 2014), 22.
- ²⁵ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D.F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 146.
- ²⁶ Scott, "Space Educates," 138.
- ²⁷ Oskar Hansen, "Process and Art – competition entry, Museum of Modern Art, Skopje, 1966," in Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 116.
- ²⁸ Newman, *New Frontiers*, 191.
- ²⁹ See Oskar Hansen, "Forma Otwarta w Architekturze – Sztuka Wielkiej Liczby" in *Struktury*, Nr. 2 (9), 1960. December 1960 and Oskar Hansen, "La Forme Ouverte – l'Art du Grande Nombre" in *La Forme Architecturale. Le Carre Bleu*, Vol. 1, 1961.
- ³⁰ Hansen, *Struktury*, 7.
- ³¹ Oskar Hansen, "Forma Otwarta" in *Przegląd Kulturalny*, Vol. 5, No. 5 (1959), 5. Trans. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius <<http://open-form.blogspot.com/2009/01/original-1959-open-form-manifesto.html>>
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 84.
- ³⁴ Oskar Hansen, "Die offene Form : Essay zum Problem nicht endgültig determinierter Planungen," *Werk: Architecture and Art*, Nr. 58 (Sept. 1971), 615.
- ³⁵ "Definitions," trans. Ken Knabb, *Internationale Situationiste* #1, June 1958. Situationist International Online. <<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline//si/definitions.html>>
- ³⁶ Hansen, *New Frontiers*, 191.
- ³⁷ Peter and Alison Smithson, "But Today We Collect Ads." *Ark*, Nr. 18. London: Royal College of Art, November 1956.
- ³⁸ Hansen, *New Frontiers*, 191.
- ³⁹ Hansen, *Werk*, 615.
- ⁴⁰ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 86.

- ⁴¹ Hansen, *New Frontiers*, 191.
- ⁴² Ibid., 134.
- ⁴³ Yona Friedman, "Program of Mobile Urbanism," 1957, in *Architecture Culture, 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology*, eds. Joan Ockman and Ed Eigen (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 274.
- ⁴⁴ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 124.
- ⁴⁵ Oskar Hansen, "Pokonać barierę między widzem i aktorem," *Polska*, no. 10, (1975), 38. In Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 121.
- ⁴⁶ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 120-123.
- ⁴⁷ Jacques Rancière *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London, New York: Continuum Books, 2004), 14.
- ⁴⁸ Oskar Hansen, *Polska*, 1975. in *Toward Open Form*, 121.
- ⁴⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 1963. (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 246-247.
- ⁵⁰ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 130.
- ⁵¹ Julia Kozakiewicz, "Konkurs Na Międzynarodowy Pomnik Ofiar Obozu w Birkenau," in *Miejsce* (Warsaw: Academy of Fine Arts. March 2017) <<http://miejsce.asp.waw.pl/konkurs-na-miedzynarodowy-pomnik-ofiar-obozu-w-birkenau-2/>> Accessed November 13, 2020.
- ⁵² I. Olszewska Grzesiuk, *Polska Rzeźba Pomnikowa w Latach 1945-1995* (Warsaw: Neriton, 1995), 98-112. Cited in Ibid.
- ⁵³ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 130.
- ⁵⁴ Electropetrification, or *elektropetryfikacja* in Polish, is a preservation process that was invented by Romuald Cebertowicz in 1946. It was used in many postwar monument projects in Poland. For further explanation of the process as it relates to the Auschwitz-Birkenau competition, see Kozakiewicz, *Miejsce*.
- ⁵⁵ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 130.
- ⁵⁶ Hansen, "Forma Otwarta," *Przegląd Kulturalny*.
- ⁵⁷ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 130.
- ⁵⁸ Theodor Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" 1951 in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997), 33
- ⁵⁹ Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman. *Mengele's Skull*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012.
- ⁶⁰ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 130.
- ⁶¹ Katarzyna, Murawska-Muthesius, "Oskar Hansen, Henry Moore and the Auschwitz Memorial debates in Poland, 1958-59" in *Figuration/Abstraction: Strategies for Public Sculpture in Europe 1945-1968*. ed. Charlotte Benton. (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 199.
- ⁶² Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 1935, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 221.
- ⁶³ Hansen and Gola, *Toward Open Form*, 196.
- ⁶⁴ Robert Jan Van Pelt and Debórah Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 378.
- ⁶⁵ Przy okrągłym stole „Życia”. Nad oświęcimskim pomnikiem. „Życie Warszawy” Nr. 305, 1958. Cited in Springer, Filip. "Zaczyn. O Zofii i Oskarze Hansenach (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art Warsaw, 2013), 26.
- ⁶⁶ Van Pelt and Dwork, *Auschwitz*, 378.
- ⁶⁷ Hansen, *New Frontiers*, 191.

Conclusion

The final chapter on Oskar Hansen and his decades-long Open Form project gives an explicit name to a larger, collective project brewing in previous chapters. Whether they intended to or not, each character of this thesis harnessed the uncertainty of their conditions. Some contrasted their shifting environment with permanence and stability; others engaged uncertainty as a generative contradiction, seeking rewards through risk. In Open Form, uncertainty became explicit, holding architecture's outlook loosely from its inception. The architectures of this thesis suggest more than an alternative to permanent objects. Indeed, the actions and results of the characters subverted architecture, not just paralleling but questioning it altogether. This subversion occurred even as buildings claimed to advance or reinforce it.

While Nowicki's *Warszawska Skarpa* essays imagine an architecture rooted in Poland's landscape, social structure, and historical experience, his projects in the years after emerged far away from home. From the state fairgrounds of North Carolina to the capital city of postcolonial Indian Punjab, architecture for Nowicki was an art, not a science. One took their work with them, refracting the qualities of place without being determined by them. As Syrkus searched in the physical and political *tabula rasa* of post-1945 Warsaw for a space to reclaim her housing activism and architectural practice, she also created an architecture of impermanence through ephemera like speeches, exhibitions, and written correspondence. For her too, architecture was a fluid process that negotiated proposals, politics and personal stakes with the past. Rupturing affiliations and even friendships were site- and audience-specific aspects of an architecture whose only real consistency was Syrkus herself. For her, the idea of architecture as form and

permanence was constantly tested by a whirlwind of risks and evolving commitments, events that themselves transformed uncertainty into real action. Her work questioned whether architecture is limited to the objects and situations produced or if it is instead events, experiences, and hopes invested in architecture that matter most. For Hansen, form should anticipate the aggregation of these moments. The ultimate shape of the form remained undefined, documenting events rather than weathering them. But Open Form, to Hansen, was still an entity; it constantly unfolded and through the events taking shape in it. I would argue that the qualities that Hansen invested in Open Form were already emerging in Warsaw's posters and exhibitions after 1945, in Nowicki's geographically dispersed architecture, in Syrkus's architectural events, and in the open-ended spatial practices of Kantor's theater. In so many ways, Open Form frames their shared intellectual and artistic project.

Over the past five chapters, architecture has flowed from disciplinary and medial spaces and into results unforeseen by its authors. Architecture has become an event, an action, a series of images, and a mobile, transformable object. It has been redefined, either by choice or by necessity, from an object in space to a process of improvisation and iteration. The thesis has veered away from a framework in which architecture is identifiable as a specific building, and from an assumption that architecture fulfills the futuristic vision of its designer. It has been a process of learning to let the characters have their own agency within the thesis—of letting go of their destinies within the writing. The intent was never to capture a comprehensive image of the architecture of Poland after 1945, but to instead frame a milieu in which events facilitated architecture. The biographical accounts of this thesis do not point in a singular direction, but demonstrate

multiple stories intersecting, overlapping, and diverging in a particular epoch and on a particular site.

This thesis provokes us to ask whether architecture should ever be conceived as a sturdy, singular, permanent object. By razing Warsaw to the ground, the Second World War demonstrated that architecture is really a temporary, fleeting idea that can easily be wiped from the face of the earth. If the characters of this thesis affirm that this alternative definition of architecture is actionable, then what are its implications for architecture as a discipline? Is the solution with Nowicki, where architecture is not a permanent fixture produced by a science, but an idea constantly dislodged from place to place—a form bound not to a site or an idea, but to the architect? Is the solution found in Syrkus's practice, where architecture makes a claim on the society that the architect feels empowered to create but modifies this claim as needed? Is architecture an event that learns—as Kantor's theater shows—not to fix boundaries between real and performed, existing and created, architecture's outside and inside, but to instead tow them?

Through the framework of Open Form, this thesis demonstrates that—like architecture—the history of Poland's post-1945 years is not a sturdy object or singular narrative either. As the “sum of events [and] individualities” leading “to the expression of a group form,” Open Form was itself a group biography, and its evolution was inseparable from Hansen's life and his context. For him, the “broadening analysis of component elements, their mutual permeation as well as the indivisible structure of society” rendered “complete, universal, whole, continuous space—space of a different psychology, a different and new morality.”¹ Conceiving this thesis as an Open Form, the characters move through the shared experience of the Second World War and emerge in

the years after to their own unique trajectory within the shared physical framework of reconstruction and the shared political framework of the new communist regime. Like Hansen's iterative manifesto, the thesis offers a spectrum of artistic agents producing architecture of more than one identity, of from than one discipline, and of projects ranging from response to uncertainty to a conceptual framework of uncertainty itself.

¹ Oskar Hansen, “The Open Form in Architecture—The Art of the Great Number” in *New Frontiers in Architecture: CIAM '59 in Otterlo*. ed. Oscar Newman (New York: Universe Books Inc., 1961), 191.

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